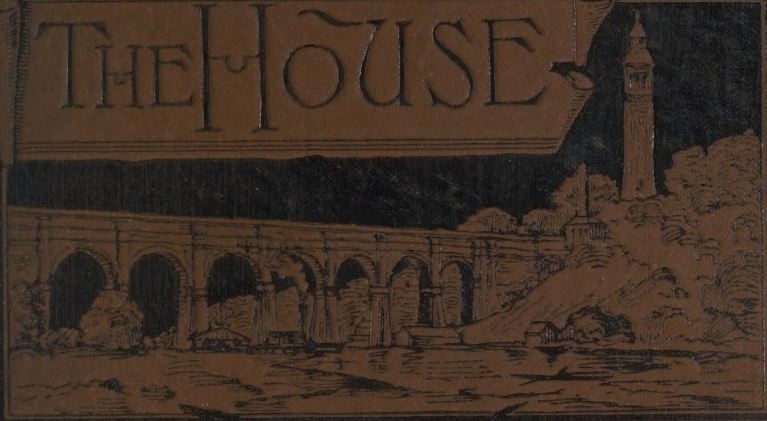


THE HOUSE



AT  
HIGH BRIDGE



EDGAR FAWCETT







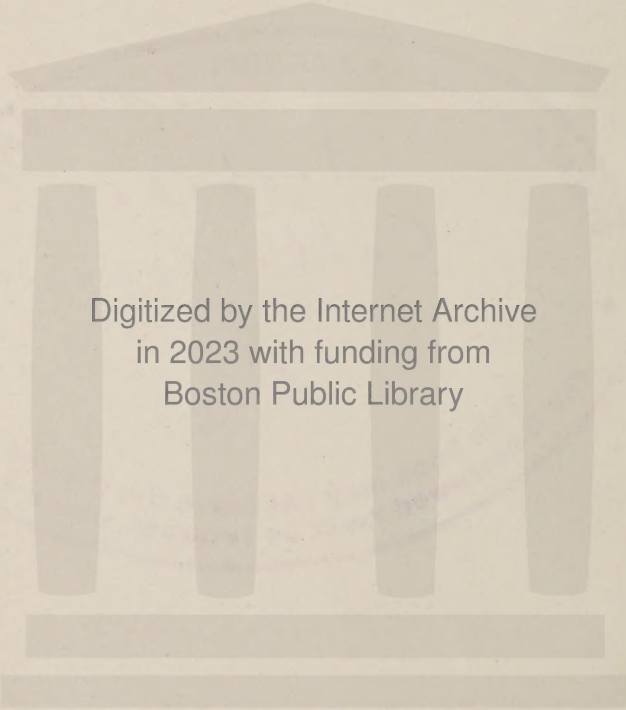


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THE  
HOUSE AT HIGH BRIDGE

*A NOVEL*

BY

EDGAR FAWCETT

AUTHOR OF "AN AMBITIOUS WOMAN," "TINKLING CYMBALS," "A GENTLEMAN  
OF LEISURE," "SOCIAL SILHOUETTES," "RUTHERFORD," ETC.



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## THE HOUSE AT HIGH BRIDGE.

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### I.

THE June morning had been a white haze of heat; and those huge arches of High Bridge, spanning so loftily a stream that is so meagre, must for hours have almost been fit to blister any hand laid upon their mighty masonry. The Elevated Railway had brought few visitors, as yet, to the various casinos and beer-gardens. But now that a little desultory breeze had sprung from the south (pleasanter, no doubt, down at the Battery than here at the upper end of Manhattan), people began to arrive in greater numbers on the noisy aerial trains. They came with flushed faces or with damply pallid ones, and in every degree of irritating fatigue; for the weather had recently given a leap of that elastic sort which long ago stole both dignity and character from our American thermometer.

Since noon, however, the leafy slopes along the river had lost their misted look, and twinkled

freshly in the awakened breeze. The river itself no longer drowsed in glassy stagnance, but had swollen with the altering tide, and was full of radiant ripples. The rest of the day promised to be more breathable; and as Mrs. Coggeshal and her daughter, Sadie, alighted from an elevated car at One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Street Station, they both felt the grateful relief of an atmospheric reprieve.

"I do think I never have known it as hot as it was in the city to-day," said Mrs. Coggeshal. "I used to believe the summers were hotter in New York, and the winters colder there, when I was a girl. But of course climates, and things like that, don't change. It's only ourselves that change. Have you got *all* your bundles, Sadie? You're sure you didn't leave any in the cars?"

"Oh, sure," said Sadie with curt confidence, and a tired ring in her voice. "I'm glad we're back," she went on, as they passed through the iron gateway, and went out upon the wooden structure which runs by at least two popular, flaring-signed restaurants before it lands you on the firm, macadamized roads and paths of the little settlement beyond.

"There he is, now," whispered Mrs. Coggeshal to her daughter, with an abrupt nudge that Sadie instantly resented by a frown of mild exasperation. Sadie's exasperations, though sometimes numerous, were always mild.

"Of course he's here," said the girl, looking straight into her mother's face, and not at all at the neat-clad male figure which had just taken several brisk steps in front of them. "Where did you think he'd be, mamma?" she went on, as if the question were meant to pierce depths of maternal conscience. "A little more, and I declare he'd have heard you. You're so careless in that way."

The two women walked much slower than the man was doing. They were both jaded by their shopping in the hot city, and moved along as if their bundles were an almost painful clog.

"He's got a real nice figure, hasn't he?" said Mrs. Coggeshal. Sadie's rebuke was one of the commonplaces of her daily experience. Like many an American mother, she would have missed it if it had not turned up more or less regularly, just as breakfast or luncheon time did, or other fixed and rigid details of her domestic routine. "He's so trim, isn't he?" she continued, with a liberal loudening of her tones, which indicated no repentance for her past misdemeanor, but merely that the object of criticism was now safely distant. "I always liked trim men. Your father used to be so for a good while. He fell all away just before you girls grew up. I wish he hadn't. I remember how he had to have all his coats and vests altered — and so suddenly too. I nearly cried over it. I'd like your Clarry to be less stout than he is; wouldn't you?"

"Your Clarry," as it happened, was the devoted lover of Sadie. They had been betrothed only a short time ago. The glance that Sadie now gave her mother was superb for its calm pity.

"Clarry suits me very well," she said, "just as he is."

"Oh, my!" said Mrs. Coggeshal, with alert apology, "I don't mean *that*, of course not." — And then she appeared to wander from her subject a little, as was frequently her habit. . . "Looks are nothing at all in a *man*: I always stuck to it that they're not. It's the man, not the looks." . . And then she wandered still further. . . "I declare, I'm ready to drop! And Sadie, to think that *he's* living just next door to us, and might have carried some of our bundles, and played the *gallant*, if we'd only known him!"

"Pooh!" said Sadie, with a languor that betrayed more physical exhaustion than scorn of the soul. "We can do very well without him. *I* think he looks as if he put on airs. And so does Clarry. If Isabel doesn't, that's her own affair."

"I believe Isabel's taken a real *shine* to him, don't you?" said Mrs. Coggeshal, turning swiftly toward her companion, momentarily forgetful of her worn state, and dropping into easy idiom.

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Sadie, with her boot-heels striking the planks beneath them in that desperate way by which a tired woman will



show how tired she is. "Isabel's always slyly watching him whenever he comes out there on the lawn. She told me yesterday that she thought he looked like a thorough gentleman. But I'm afraid I don't quite know what her idea of a thorough gentleman really is.— Oh, dear! I wish we were even nearer home than we are! I thought it was cooler; but it isn't much, is it?"

"No; there's a breeze here, but when you walk you don't seem to get it; you seem to be moving just out of it all the time."

About a half-mile beyond this wooden viaduct which they had now nearly crossed, and which linked the lofty railway with one side of the heights bordering Harlem River valley, loomed High Bridge itself, notable and even magnificent, as a monument of human endeavor. The bridge is so beautiful and stately as to strike a fine human note of grace and truth for the whole undulating country that surrounds it. From almost whatever point you regard it, you feel that it makes a memorable picture, and that its quiet grandeur speaks with secure prophecy of the classic association which may invest this whole region at some future time. Not many years ago these environments were desolate and depressing enough, when, at low tide, the river left doleful tracts of swamp to drowse between lonely acclivities that may once have been its actual shores.

But High Bridge has amply asserted, since then, a character and a personality. True, it seems almost absurdly solid and monstrous when compared with the trifling current below it, unless you remember the hidden mass of waters ever rushing through its gigantic inner framework. And for this reason, like many earthly achievements of importance, it may so err from codes of art as to befriend the needs of future critics. Still as a coigne of interest, rearing more than a hundred feet in air a stoutly protected artery of nutrition for the immense neighboring city, it can not well escape the heed of unborn times. And already its fame among the people seems to be well defined. On clement Sundays the stolid floor of the bridge itself swarms with strollers and idlers, the restaurants on every side are cloudy with convivial tobacco, the shooting-galleries are haunts of a ceaseless cracking sound, and the romantic woods that clothe the steeps hear their green aisles ring with mirth. High Bridge is plebeian, like most suburban places; and yet its charm has of late grown so positive that even such foes of ugliness as abhor the Elevated Railroad in our not over-handsome New York, might sometimes feel their hate soften on recalling how much nearer they are than of old to a spot rich in holiday diversions. And the phenomenal bridge is surely alone responsible for all this gayety, to which those who dwell more or less near it

(and often in neat, tasteful villas) give slight apparent concern.

The Coggeshals had occupied one of these villas for two years past. It was a small, square house with a faintly metropolitan look about its shining plate-glass windows, its heavy, ornate front door and its outer bell-handle of wrought bronze. But its fanciful roof, native-colored brick exterior and subdued copings bespoke an architect with at least a cleanly conscience. The little garden that surrounded it was a temporary concession of its landlord; and houses had recently been springing up all about it with such mushroom speed that you could scarcely doubt the sweet beds of geranium and coleus at either side to have won but a brief and pretty vantage, already touched by doom.

The house was close enough to the station, fronting on one of the broad main avenues of the suburb. All here will some day be as visibly New York as it is now actually. But to the Coggeshals, who disliked their villa most keenly in winter, and grimly tolerated it in summer, the district often appeared dreary leagues away from Macy's emporium, Daly's Theatre, Brentano's bookstore, and a hundred other contemporary attractions and requisites.

As Mrs. Coggeshal and Sadie drew toward the open doorway of their residence, they perceived that a slender maidenly form had emerged as if

to meet them. This was Isabel, the younger daughter of the house, and its sole other child. She and Sadie were very nearly of an age, though of wide dissimilarity in many ways not settled by years.

"You two poor, hot things!" said Isabel, with a commiserating little laugh, as she relieved her mother of a bundle heavier than its mates, and offered her instead a Japanese fan. "You both look broiled. Was it so dreadful in town?"

"*Don't!*" said Mrs. Coggeshal, as she dropped into a hall-chair. "We were very foolish indeed to go."

Isabel was taking the residuary bundles from her mother, with a sympathetic air and a humane side-glance for Sadie, who poured all her own brown-paper burdens upon one opportune chair before she sank into another.

"Yes, you were foolish," said Isabel. "But the weather has changed up here: you'll soon find that it has. There's quite a draught through this hall. Don't you feel it already?"

"I only feel *this* draught," said Mrs. Coggeshal, with a frantic but effete motion of her fan; "and I've scarcely got strength to make it."

Isabel took the fan away, and used it with quiet vigor upon her mother, while she untied the lady's bonnet-strings. She was dressed in a cool, white gown that let you see how well proportioned to her slimness was the delicacy of her rounded arms



and bosom. She had blue eyes, large, bright, and verging upon gray; but her hair, which was profuse and waved crisply, rivalled the night for darkness. Her whole presence was full of winning cadences; her voice pleased by its most careless tones, it was so full and smooth; in the movement of her hand, while it swayed the fan, dwelt as much felicity as freedom. Something about her made you promptly grant that she was a girl whose honesty of motive equalled the secure force with which she could maintain it.

“At the last moment,” she now said, “I felt like running after you and calling you back, while you trudged down the street in that severe sun. There’ll be a frightful list of sunstrokes in the city to-day. Just think how sad it would have sounded, if, among the victims, there had been a young bride and her blooming mamma, who had left their palatial residence near High Bridge for the purpose of making a few purchases which would complete the bride’s already sumptuous *trousseau*!” Here Isabel looked at her sister, while she still continued her serene oscillations with the fan.

Sadie did no more than just return the glance. She never laughed at Isabel’s humor, and rarely even smiled at it; she had been used to it so long. Besides, very few things made her either laugh or smile. Not that she took life solemnly, but rather that she took it without humor, like an

unsalted soup. She objected, on the other hand, to Isabel's fun when it was personal, and especially when it concerned her own engagement to Mr. Clarence Coulter. Sadie had often had her suspicions as to the way in which her "Clarry" might be regarded by the subtle and fathomless mind of Isabel. Fertile in sarcasms, nimble to leap at the very heart of a foible, an idiosyncrasy, a mannerism, Isabel has shown, thus far, unwonted reticence regarding her sister's betrothed. And for Sadie Coggeshal her "Clarry" was quite the miraculous being usually to be found under such conditions of attachment.

"Of course," Isabel continued, "they would have mentioned you as the wife and daughter of our eminent American novelist, Mr. Herbert Coggeshal." Here her tones changed a little. "And I'm glad enough to say that poor papa does at last deserve the name."

Mrs. Coggeshal nodded genially. Her faded face, with its sallow sag of the cheek under either dim-blue eye, could easily express any amiable mood: it had dealt in few other portrayals for about fifty years. Her husband had always been a mystery to her, and she had served him since their marriage, like the priestess who meekly discharges her share of a divine cult, with full perception that there are several thresholds of the temple still between herself and deity. It may well have occurred to her, that Isabel had alone

crossed this intervening distance. But she was quite satisfied in having so competent a deputy; for Isabel, whom she had so often called "her father over again," stood second, in the admiration of this gentle zealot, to only Mr. Coggeshal himself.

"Deserve to be called eminent!" she now exclaimed, after her approving nod. "Well, if you'd been with us in the city to-day I guess you'd have said so! Why, the book was just everywhere! Wasn't it Sadie?"

"Yes," said Sadie, a little mechanically.

She had taken off her natty, befeathered round-hat, and was touching her brow and temples with a crumpled handkerchief. The heat gave her a few tints of undue color; but they were merely a tepid pink, for her skin wore by nature that creamy pallor which goes with hair of reddish hue and lustre. Lovely hair Sadie's was, and its folds crinkled over large eyes of a drowsy but pellucid blue. Those who said that she had a stupid face were willing to admit that it was a handsome one. She had strong points of resemblance to the type which her mother had once been, but as a born beauty she clearly excelled it; and her figure, cast in a much more generous mould, melted from one to another line of elegance with a fluency foreign to so robust a shape.

"Oh, we saw the book all over!" Sadie pursued. "All the bookstores have bills with its

name in big letters, ready to stare you in the face."

"And all the book-counters of the Elevated Railroad," struck in Mrs. Coggeshal. "I asked the man at the Fourteenth Street one, how it was selling and he said it was the best book of the season."

"Oh, he'd tell *you* that!" answered Isabel, with a scepticism that somehow missed fire, and showed a sly credence. "He thought you meant to buy a copy."

"Why, certainly he did!" said Sadie, bristling languidly. "I felt so mortified when mamma just nodded her head and walked off!"

"Perhaps he thought mamma was the author," said Isabel, in her gay way. "Well, he came next door to it, didn't he?"

Mrs. Coggeshal gave a faint laugh. "My! as if I was next door to your father in *anything*, Belle! Where is he, by the by? in the library?"

"Yes," said Isabel. "He doesn't know you're back."

Mrs. Coggeshal, who was cooler, took a musing air. "I wonder why he *is* so, lately," she murmured. "So" appeared to be a monosyllable of reference to some mental or physical state which both her daughters were expected instantly to understand.

"I told you, mamma," at once said Isabel,



"that it must be the success of 'Rachel Rand.' After writing several novels, papa has made a hit at last."

Mrs. Coggeshal scanned the hall-carpet. "He always said he didn't care to make a hit, Belle; and I don't think he did. But perhaps you're right. When it came, he did care; and it's made him fidgety and queer ever since."

This did not appear at all to interest Sadie. She spoke in her slow, neutral voice to Isabel. "You never saw any thing like the way things are marked down at Altman's, Belle," she said. "Summer prices, you know. We've got such lovely bugle trimming for a silk costume! And *gloves!* Well, wait till you see."

"I suppose you've ruined the family, between you," said Isabel. "Now that you're both cooler," she added dryly, "you begin to look guilty. . . . Did you meet anybody we know?"

Sadie shook her head. And then, with a glance of immense mystery at Sadie, Mrs. Coggeshal exclaimed: "Yes, we did!"

Sadie seemed dazed for an instant. But soon a gleam of intelligence lit her face dimly, as all such gleams always did light it.

"Oh, yes," she assented. "Mr. Brockholst. He came up on the same train with us."

Isabel looked a little conscious. "I saw him go into his house," she said, "a short time before you got here."

Sadie laughed again. "You always see him do every thing," she softly declared. "Belle, you *are* gone about him!"

"Nonsense," said Isabel. Her dark head had dropped slightly sideways. "I asked you if you'd met any one we *know*!"

Soon after this came a prolonged opening of bundles, discussion concerning prices, and conflict as to whether certain bargains had been bargains at all. The conflict was waged alone and intrepidly by Isabel against her mother and sister as allies. Both the latter had long been fond of saying that she was extravagant, and without any natural sense of economy in purchase. Perhaps a memory or two of past mortifying blunders may have spurred the girl into her present self-assertion; or perhaps it was all less serious with her than it looked. For she ended it by a laugh, and so lost her battle, as no doubt she deserved to do.

"You're a very superior girl, Belle Coggeshal," exclaimed her mother. "I've always held to it that you're a *very* superior girl. But when you attempt to tell *us* that we've given too much a yard for nun's-veiling like *that*, why, you just show you don't know what you're talking about."

"I wouldn't waste time trying to convince her," said Sadie to her mother, with all the scorn of a great artist for a bungling tyro. The profoundest mysteries of "cheap shopping" held no secrets for Sadie. She had latterly eclipsed even her mother

in this unerring quality; the wildest clerk could not deceive her; and, now that she was trying to make a slender purse buy her a smart wedding-outfit, some kind of instinct, like a canine scent, had seemed to be developed in her, by means of which she was drawn toward the luckiest and fattest of prizes. It was all very well for Isabel to talk understandingly about Emerson with her father, or to discuss intelligently what she might hold as "weak points" in Spencer or Lecky; but, when it came to moving among the bales of Altman's or Macy's drygoods with serenity and discrimination, there it was quite another question; and there, as Sadie felt securely enough convinced, her sister might with profit take a long term of schooling from herself.

After Isabel had good-humoredly given up the contest she revealed further proof of magnanimity by making a pitcherful of iced lemonade for Sadie and her mother. She left them drinking it in the near dining-room. They had lunched in town, and it was now past four o'clock; so that they wanted no more solid refreshment until their usual six-o'clock dinner. A little later Isabel sought her father in his cosy study at the back of the house. The study was just to the rear of the drawing-room and was reached through the same hall in which that rather loud wrangle had lately been held. Mr. Coggeshal was seated at his desk. A half-written page lay before him. Isabel

always came and went, as regarded this room, with the freedom of a confirmed familiar.

"I suppose you know they're back, papa," she said, looking at him with a tenderness of which she was never aware, and which had been noticed by others as a change both quick and constant.

"Yes," he answered; "I heard them."

"You must have heard us all three," said Isabel, smiling. "Mamma and Sadie, when it's a matter of getting things cheap, look down on me from vast heights. They're so self-satisfied about it, that they won't make any allowances for my mutilated vanity."

"I see. And that undergoes a stormy surrender."

"Of course it does. I dare say there's nothing in us that dies quite so hard." She paused a moment. She was thinking of how he had sat there and not gone to meet them when they returned, though he knew so well, from the voices, that they were just outside in the hall. He would not have acted like this last year, nor even three months ago. What was the meaning of such alteration in him? — such indifference, reserve, apathy, gloom, whatever it should be called?

"Still, no doubt mamma and Sadie consider themselves entitled to respect by a well-earned reputation for shrewd trading," she continued, her buoyancy coming back again. "Success is apt to make autocrats." Here she gave a swift little mo-

tion toward her father which had in it a touch of pretty repentance. She laid her hand gently on his shoulder for an instant, and the very gesture, faint as it was, conveyed the idea of a warmer caress. "I don't mean that of *you*!" she exclaimed. "Your success hasn't done *that*."

"My success?" he repeated, in a voice that sounded odd to her, and always sounded so, often as he nowadays would speak in it.

"Oh, papa!" she cried reproachfully, "as if you didn't know that your novel *is* a success! And it does not cheer or gladden you at all! It seems only to turn you sad!" He started, and she went on as though eager to tell him something which she had made up her mind to tell, and feared postponing for another hour, lest it should remain harmfully unspoken. "You know I don't fret people, as a rule, about their ways of acting. I believe everybody was born with a native nimbus of privacy that the most intimate companionship shouldn't break. . . . Dear papa, for this very reason I've never before even referred to something which worries me very much — which worries us all."

He had taken her hand, and was holding it in both his own. But he was not looking up at her from his place by the desk. He had fixed his eyes upon the sunny open space at the back of the house, viewed clearly through the half-shaded window just in front of him. Some marigolds were there in clusters, and a few spires of crimson



hollyhocks, all seeming as if the slanted afternoon sunlight had brought relief to them since the sickening down-pour of noonday heat.

"What worries you, Isabel?" he said.

He appeared to ask the question as if he already knew its answer. He was a tall, thin man, rather angular of build, with a face full of thought and force. His signs of weakness were in the too abrupt slope of chin and jaw, where a beard of natural black grew sparsely, spotted with white. His forehead showed power, and there was intellect in the sparkle of his dark-blue eyes, which he had given to Isabel with a variance of hue but not of expression.

"Your despondency, papa," Isabel said. "You know very well that I'm right, that you're not half so contented as you used to be. And I somehow can't believe it's your health, for you're not unwell. I've watched you more closely than you've guessed, and I believe there isn't the least trouble of *that* sort. It seems to be something on your mind, papa. And it can't be money-matters. We're just as prosperous as we've always been, aren't we? There's exactly so much, and we all know it, and not one of us ever forgets it. If anybody is extravagant it's I, and my atrocities in that direction are not very flagrant. . . Oh, papa, I wish you'd tell me what the matter really is! You know how you and I have always been such very dear friends!"

He lifted his eyes to hers, now ; and as he did so she stooped and kissed him on the lips.

"*Tell* me !" she said, almost as if her soul had gone into her voice.

"There's nothing to tell," he answered.

"No, papa? Really? . . . But you ought to be in such splendid spirits!"

"Why?" he asked, still looking up at her.

"*Why*, papa! Because you've made such a great success at last! You know that you have! And how deceitful you were about it, too! I sometimes think I can never forgive you for *that*. You never told me that you'd even *written* 'Rachel Rand.' You kept the whole thing an absolute secret."

He had dropped his eyes again. "Well, my dear, the secret is out now."

"I should say it was! And you ought to be so happy! But you are not. You have lost all your old lightness. Poor mamma feels the difference, just as Sadie and I do. Papa, make an effort to be *yourself* again! Will you not? Will you not for my sake?"

He rose as she ended, and silently took her in his arms. He kissed her once or twice, and stroked her hair while her head nestled against him. This had been his way of caressing her ever since she had been a little girl—and yet not quite his way. For something soon made Isabel lift startled eyes to his face, and, as she did so

she saw that it had grown pale and that his lips were twitching. In another minute he had put her from him, though not with the least roughness.

"I have really nothing to tell you, Isabel," he said. "I don't deny that there is some change in me; at times I even notice it myself. I try to guess what it is, and — what has caused it. But I — I don't find out. No, I don't find out." He was staring forth at the marigolds and hollyhocks again, and had begun to smooth his ragged beard nervously with one hand. "You must not concern yourselves with the matter at all. Advise your mother and Sadie not to do so. Be a sensible girl, as I've always found you thus far. The merriest mind will get a little gloomy sometimes. I was never merry, you know; and if now you see me a trifle dull, perhaps a livelier change will come round again with the altering season. . . I fancy we're all more or less barometric, my dear, in mysterious ways that science is yet very far from explaining, spite of all her recent victories."

Toward the latter part of this speech his voice had grown more composed and natural. But, if there was calm in it there was also dismissal of the late subject. And Isabel, trying to believe that her effort had not been a failure, and that she had learned something in learning that there was truly no secret to be disclosed, refrained from all further appeal.

After she had once more left him alone in his

study, Herbert Coggeshal felt, for perhaps the hundredth time since a certain event had taken place, that it would perhaps have been far better to have told her all his bitter and burdensome secret. He knew the full scope and vigor of her filial love. He knew that her impulse would be to shield him at almost any cost, the instant her first shock of real horror had passed. But there lay the fatal impediment to confession! Mixed with such horror would be an inevitable thrill of contempt. He had not the least doubt as to what her nature was: he had studied it lovingly with her growth from girl to woman. She was all fine gold as far as honor and probity went. He himself had taught her the worth of right doing, and this tuition had been as easy as to train her secure and flexible mind in grasping the facts and formulas of books. Her weak points had no concern with any possibility of such a crime as that which now stained his own life. And yet she was capable of realizing the magnitude of his recent temptation; she might even, in a manner, sympathize with it. That she would pardon it, sooner or later, in so far as personal arraignment or accusation would go, he was also confident enough. Her love and pity must conquer, in the end, all forces of indignation or disgust. But her respect—the respect which he found himself treasuring beyond price, now that he recognized how utterly barren was his title to

it — would not this be shattered and annulled forever? And that melancholy, mocking result he both feared and loathed to face.

But his dread and aversion did not stop here. Isabel might never be content with any half-measures of repentance. She might demand, with an imperiousness that his guilt could not resist, entire reparation, restitution, self-humiliation. Her attitude would almost surely be the acute reverse of her mother's, or of her sister Sadie's. They would tremble before the novelty of such a misdeed, and weep at its evil; but when more tranquil nerves had steadied them they would counsel protracted concealment as the one sure remedy against disgrace. They would never give a thought to that moral degradation which the very publicity of such disgrace might alleviate. They would not see, as Isabel would see, that the sole way out of the sin was for him who had done it to inform the world of its commission. They would remember the shame to themselves entailed by a disclosure of this rank sort, and yet not so selfishly that they would forget its ruining scandal for him whose name they bore. To tell them all would be merely to inflict upon them a cruel sorrow, and to terrify them lest the grievous truth should transpire. But to tell Isabel all would be to sound the inmost depths of her native honesty while testing the utmost limit of her love. She would shrink from



the worse obloquy of silence, and though she proffered the richest lenitives of compassion, she might require that justice be recompensed in the full measure of the wrong it had received.

‘But why torment myself with reflections like these?’ Herbert Coggeshal said to his own unhappy spirit, while he now slowly paced the floor of the study in which Isabel had left him. ‘A hundred times better that I should keep my lips locked until death makes them fast forever! Only one other being besides myself knows it all, and has not he the best of motives for saying nothing?’

But even there he paused in his train of dreary self-comfortings; for a certain remembrance which had haunted him during several days past returned now, and with a chill of painful presentiment to which he had already grown accustomed.

“I must see Carolan to-night,” he said aloud, “and ask him if the coming of this young Brockholst can mean the slightest danger. If it does” —

He did not end the sentence. But the dying color on his cheek seemed to end it instead, as he knotted both hands together, and sank, with a long, low sigh, into his former seat at the desk.

## II.

DURING dinner that evening the Coggeshal family-circle received an addition, in the way of Mr. Clarence Coulter, the betrothed of Sadie. Mr. Coulter came into the dining-room with a small, fluttered laugh, just after the soup had been taken away. The laugh was indeed so faint that Sadie alone heard it. She turned toward the doorway; and as the plump body, coy little black moustache and beady eyes of her "Clarry" were discerned by her, gave an agitated exclamation of "*Why!*" and hurried to the new-comer. Then they both disappeared, and it was presumable that some sort of brief but fond salute occurred in the ambush of the outer hall. A little later Sadie returned, with a refreshed and stimulated air, at the side of her lover.

"It's too bad," soon said Mrs. Coggeshal, with rueful hospitality, to the latter. "We wouldn't have sat down without you if we hadn't really given you up."

"I told you he said he might be kept at the office," quietly struck in Sadie. She had no open charge to make; covert insinuations was more in

her line. But at the same time, if her "Clarry" did really get a plate of cold soup, it was just as well that he should know *she* was not blamable.

"Oh, I'm glad you didn't wait!" said Clarry, with ardor, to Mrs. Coggeshal.

"You're young and strong enough to catch up with us, are you not?" said Sadie's father; and Clarry gave a lusty nod of the head, and a copious bass laugh, and replied, "Yes, sir; I guess I am!" Sadie had asked him not to call her father "sir;" and he had recollected her request on several occasions, just at the needful moment and no earlier. But anything like a joke from Mr. Coggeshal, of whom he had always stood in deep awe, was too dizzying for the preservation of even this haphazard forethought. Coggeshal represented to the young man great funds of intellectual superiority and of condescending indulgence as well. He had permitted his daughter Sadie's betrothal, and that was alone a large step in the line of toleration. Mr. Clarence Coulter dwelt not far away, in a modest little house owned by his widowed mother. This residence was about all that the lady did own; and her son's salary, as pay-teller of a New-York bank, materially aided the support of herself and daughter. It was by no means a brilliant match for Sadie, and yet it was a love-match in the most wholesome degree. The two young people had met, about six months ago, at a neighbor's evening-party, and love had

sprung with romantic speed from the meeting. Sadie's mind was matrimonially made up, after the fashion of the true American maiden, before she instructed her admirer to ask her father's consent. She had not considered the question of having him ask her mother's. But she knew very well that the whole affair would be ultimately referred to Isabel. Sooner or later all important affairs of the Coggeshal household *were* referred to Isabel. And it happened precisely as Sadie had expected. Mr. Coggeshal, absorbed in correcting the proofs of his new novel, "Rachel Rand," had consulted his younger daughter regarding this proposed alliance with even more than his wonted deference to her judicial opinions. He was a man who had always professed strongly democratic social views; and during the last few years, when his fortunes had drifted from easy prosperity to a rather cramped though permanent state of finances here at High Bridge, he had lost even his last slender hold upon the so-called dignity of caste.

"You know a great deal more about this young man than I do, Belle," he had said. "I suppose that if he's thrifty and of good general instincts there's no reason why Sadie shouldn't have her way about him."

Isabel made only a brief demur. She did not at all like the idea of Mr. Clarence Coulter becoming her kinsman. But she felt that the

chances were slender of Sadie ever wedding much above the standard supplied by that young gentleman. "We are a broken-down family," sadly argued Isabel to herself, "and I suppose we must resignedly accept the results of our downfall." But still another motive swayed her in presenting no obstacle to the engagement. Sadie was deeply in love with her stout, dapper little bank-clerk. A wide sea of difference lay between the two sisters; but Sadie, with all her deeps of oppositeness, was yet near in blood and in affection. She was Sadie, and she would suffer passionately if crossed in this most vital of exigents. Why sow the seeds of an empty and fruitless pain? If the paying-teller never got a dollar more of wage than he got this hour, Sadie would doubtless be happy enough as his wife, whether they dwelt together in High Bridge, in Hoboken, or in East New York. She would retain her talents for economical shopping; she would turn and trim her frocks adroitly; she would make a good appearance every Sunday at church, in a modish bonnet wrought by her own deft fingers; she would have her little suburban circle of intimates, her gentle dissipations of gossip, her conventional tasks, amusements or prejudices. She would pass for amiable (everybody frankly admitted of Sadie that she was "amiable") just as she had always passed since a very young child, and be in reality trying, mulishly obstinate, meekly but inexorably "set" and *difficile*. Why



oppose her marriage? There seemed to Isabel more and more of useless arrogance, even superciliousness, in her own assumption of any such hostile posture, the more that she gave it her best and calmest heed.

They were a happy enough house in their way, and yet they had always been a house divided against itself. Years ago the head of it, Herbert Coggeshal, had stooped, as the patrician phrase goes, by his marriage. He had been the son of a New York merchant whose record as a West India trader was past reproach, and whose cousinships could be numbered among such people as the Van Twillers, the Van Corlears and the Ten Eycks. Old Mr. Coggeshal had sent his son, Herbert, to Columbia College, and had expected of his son, after a rather creditable graduation there, any thing but the reckless act which he soon afterward committed. Even those who pour much scorn upon the fact of family pride existing at all in our republican realm except as a glaring incongruity, cannot be very noteworthy assailants if they deny the depth of the roots which family pride has for at least two centuries been striking into our soil; and old Samuel Coggeshal, when all is told, stood perhaps for as doughty an exponent of it as any householder from the Battery to Bond Street. He frowned in dire offence at his son's marriage with poor, mild-mannered little Lucy Hook, the daughter of some one who had kept a

popular eating-house not far from Bowling Green. No red-faced English squire could have fumed and blustered more under the same piercing revelation. He did not live long after he had learned the unpalatable tidings; and a story ran — as a story is so apt to run, when it can prettily embellish the demise of any such irate and injured parent — that Herbert's gross imprudence had killed him.

But Herbert had never been brought by the longest lapse of time to look upon it as an imprudence at all. He had chosen the woman he loved, and he had never regretted his choice. She was not mentally companionable as his wife, but he, on the other hand, felt no need of a wife who was mentally companionable. It was only years later, when his second daughter, Isabel, began to grow up, that he began to recognize the possibility of such a gratification. He was a man of literary tastes, with strong belief in his creative capacity and entire ignorance that he looked at the whole plan of life from the standpoint of other men's writings about it and not through the medium of personal observation. He had gone to work with a marked imitative tendency which he entirely mistook for an original, inherent force. We have heard his wife say that he had never cared to make a popular success with his books. But he had had his fling at the sham of mere saleability in novel-writing, as it is possible that every active romancer, from Boccaccio down, has had during

certain dainty or idealistic moods. In reality he had concealed his deep disappointment as well as he could from everybody, when novel after novel fell flat upon the public it addressed. Meanwhile he had worked hard with two hands, as it were, at two separate tasks. One had been the management of a rather lucrative weekly journal of a sort quite practical and inartistic, and one had been the serious weaving of his ambitious and redundant tales. The name of the journal was *The Tanner*, and it was devoted wholly to the interests of the leather-trade in his own and a few other large American cities. He detested the editorial place which he held, and retained it for years on the ground of emolument alone. The place itself had fallen to him merely by a lucky accident, just after his marriage. He was at first ignorant of the very subjects concerning which fate had called upon him to write; but he had always been quick at seizing facts, and when the senior editor suddenly died, and he was asked to exchange apprenticeship for superintendence, his glib knack of rhetoric easily did the rest. To know a thing, and to write effective periods about it, are two accomplishments of whose striking diversity current journalism has long given ample proof; and with a few sub-editors at his command of actual information and experience, Coggeshal was able to throw handsomely and deceptively over the leather-trade a "light that never was,"

and one which perhaps never ought to have been either.

But he kept securely at his post, and even won repute as custodian of *The Tanner*. He had learned how to avoid disastrous blunders, and this always means a great deal where it is a case of responsible incompetence. Neat concealment is the most telling diplomacy of the trusted charlatan. Coggeshal often almost felt as if he were that, and never so much as when, at a dinner to "the trade," he stood up and wove tinsel threads of mercantile sagacity amid that non-committal woof of oratory which loaded digestions and smoke-beclouded visions were persuaded to call eloquence. His after-dinner speeches were always glittering credentials of his worthiness to remain where fortune had drifted him. They were models of artful discrimination between topics of safety and topics of peril.

Meanwhile he continued to write his unsuccessful novels, to live in fair comfort with his family, and to save one or two annual thousands from his regular rewards. His father had not relentlessly cut him off, but the inheritance had been a meagre one, and he had chosen not legally to contest it. Some of his relations who had received the bulk of the paternal property, moved in what are called high metropolitan circles. But he rarely saw them, and made no effort to walk in their decorous pathways. He had but a single purpose in life — to

become a novelist of conceded excellence and leading fame. He despised other gifts which might have secured for him, if earnestly cultured, a recompense both of wealth and prominence. His aim was to use these gifts but in one way — toward the securing of a steady future income which would lift his family and himself above all the stings and thrusts of want. Then, having achieved such tangible surety, he would lapse quietly into the calmer life of letters, he would work out masterpieces, he would give to his land that "great American novel" which just about at this time we had all begun avidly to clamor for.

And he deserves to be placed on the limited list of those who reach, during our sublunar term, the goal of their pecuniary hopes. It is by no means meant that when new brains and purses brought with them a clear sweep of all the old machinery of *The Tanner*, Coggeshal's dismissal left him with the full amount which he had hoped to realize before such exit. But he had already saved enough to blend very encouragingly with what his father had bequeathed him. He did not rise from his editorial chair for the last time with anything like a qualm of despair. He even had a few stray invested bonds whose sale would permit him to make a sojourn in Europe. And shortly afterward he went to Europe with his youngest daughter, Isabel, leaving his wife and Sadie on these shores.



He had certainly perfected and attained something, after all. He saw too much of that immense majority who strive and fail, not to comprehend that he had distinctly escaped their doleful destiny. In a worldly sense, he had begun his life wrong, he had offended a rich and indulgent father, he had married humbly and quite beneath him. But he had conquered the harsh results of all this ; he had driven the wolf from his door, though that door might not be a specially smart one as concerned its decorative carpentry. Still, it was sturdy ; it would last his own and his wife's time, and keep bad weather from his children, too, if neither of them should marry behind prettier panellings. But in all such modest acceptance of victory there was for Herbert Coggeshal one keen element of defeat.

He did not perhaps acknowledge it to his most secret meditations, but it was nevertheless positively there. His start had been a moral one, even to the verge of chivalry ; his conscience had been as sensitive to evil as a water-surface is to rain-drops. But later he had turned disloyal to his own fine tenets ; he had let an unknightly tarnish creep across the lustre of his shield ; he had dealt, during his management of *The Tanner*, in something close to hypocrisy and fraud. It had all been a masquerade, a hoisting of false colors, a clever striving to appear that which he was not before the eyes of his fellows. And like every such downward step

it had entailed a lower level of manliness. It made that which afterwards happened more easy to happen. The purer the hand that plays with flame, the more readily it may be soiled by scorch.

His stay in Europe with Isabel lasted three years, and during most of the time his daughter was at an admirable French boarding-school, not far from Paris. Isabel quickly profited by this advantage; she enjoyed several months of travel, too, with her father, through half the famed cities of the Old World. On her return home, at seventeen, she was well-versed in two languages besides her own, keenly alive to the niceties and the graces of living, and as different from the staid, hard-lined mental methods of Sadie as a delicate-swaying rose from a stiff-stemmed azalea. Sadie had never understood her sister at all well, and she now understood her far worse. But Isabel warmed to her as she had always done, and took up the rôle of consideration, indulgence and allowance-making just where she had left it three years before. The house at High Bridge had been a necessity; for more money had slipped away during that absence abroad than Coggeshal had either calculated upon or intended. None of the four liked being thus domiciled in the suburbs, and perhaps Isabel, after what her fresh young mind had met abroad, liked it least of any. But she made no audible complaint, which cannot by any

means be recorded of Sadie and her mother, who were at first loud in their protested aversion. Sadie, meeting her "Clarry," had finally become consoled; Mrs. Coggeshal had sunk into a state of benign resignation; but Isabel, with her store of transatlantic impressions and her natural forces of brain and temperament, chafed silently at what seemed to her a stringent duress. To dwell near a great city and feel one's self no part of its throb and stir always brings longing discontent to youth, when culture has made youth eager for congenial association. And Isabel, with her early aptitudes nurtured by her father's fond teachings, with her three years of schooling abroad, and with her constant reading of those good foreign books now procurable to any American who wants them, because our country casts its own authors into the dust by defrauding the authors of other countries, — Isabel, I say, felt the drag of time and the monotony of bondage in no slight degree.

With Coggeshal, however, it was different. He would certainly have preferred the city proper to High Bridge or any similar environ. But he wanted retirement for the beginning of new and very serious labors, and though he would have chosen it to be the sort of retirement which may command a glimpse of Union Square or the Worth Monument from an adjoining window, he still failed to languish in its isolation. Six novels had left his pen before he had departed for Europe.

While abroad he had completed the seventh, publishing it immediately on his return. All had been works of thought and force, but in all there was the one fatal drawback; they lacked the element of interest. They did not lead their readers on, from chapter to chapter, or even from page to page. To read them was like moving through a woodland in which trees of girth and grandeur rose on every side of you, yet with each trunk, each twig, each leaf, in exact likeness one to the other. They were too didactic, too formal, too cumbrous to be the best literature, and yet if you knew what literature is you must have granted that they came well within her domain. The critics always treated them with consideration, — a touching testimony to their dulness, if not to their superior points. But they had obtained no vogue, apart from their unpopularity. They were quite without that small clique of enthusiasts who can transform an ill-appreciated good thing in letters to a thing which its author may eventually hail as reward for the masses' neglect. And with reference to a future-blossoming glory — an immortality, in fact — they stood no chance whatever. They had neither enough true imagination nor enough true passion — qualities which, one or the other, are the test and preservative of all greatness in fiction. They must either win the taste of their time, or perish hereafter. The first they had not done; that they should not do the second

was irreversible as fate itself. And yet their failure to do either was fraught with pathos; they aimed so high, and they missed their aim with so much real distinction and dignity.

No one, apparently, expected that any of their successors would either fail or miss. No one seemed either to think or to care on the subject. But after his first six months of residence at High Bridge, Coggeshal had produced a work which his wearied and indifferent publishers forced him to issue at his own expense. This was "Rachel Rand," of which mention has already been made, and of whose composition, as we have also learned, even Isabel, his devoted admirer and friend in all undertakings of every known sort, had remained wholly ignorant.

"Rachel Rand" had encountered, at first, a cold critical reception. It puzzled the gentlemen of the newspapers; it was unexpected, it violated tradition, it touched amazing novelties in the way of precedent. Some journalistic pens roundly damned it; others met it gingerly with their nibs, inscribing non-committal comments, and perhaps leaving a sly little blot of rancor. The critics, who are so often hated and so rarely pitied, never showed themselves so deserving of pity as now. Their incapacity to do more than admit their disqualification for dealing with anything whose merits demanded a new line of eulogy and whose faults invoked a new effort of



censure, was at once plainly manifest. But meanwhile "Rachel Rand" gained quietly in public estimation. People bought it, read it, laughed and cried over it, advised their friends to dip into it, spoke of it irrelevantly at times of commercial pursuit, and greeted it with a singularly loud acclaim. And then, as always happens, the critics who had denounced it most hotly, wrote with vehemence in its favor. The book proved a phenomenal success, and many a jaded scribe of Printing House Square and thereabouts drew on his resources of encomium just as he had before drawn on those of vituperation.

The conversation this evening at dinner had soon flowed easily enough toward the topic of "Rachel Rand." And Mr. Clarence Coulter felt much more at his ease when it had done so. He had partaken of his luke-warm soup, and had creditably squared accounts, as it were, with his fellow-consumers by the time that the lamb-and-peas became a reality. Meanwhile he had found, with a flush followed by a chill, that the general talk was showing sad gaps which he was evidently held responsible for. He gave Isabel one or two furtive glances, and did not feel reassured. There was always something about Isabel which made him think she did her best not to let him know that she held herself above him. As for Mr. Coggeshal, the poor young bank-clerk could not have regarded him more exceptionally if con-

vinced that he had dropped from another star. Clarry had read every word of Coggeshal's novels since his engagement to Sadie. He had not liked seven of them at all, and he had taken up the eighth with a calm obedience to the discipline of duty. And yet not liking the works of his prospective father-in-law was with Clarry a very different thing from presuming to approve his own distaste for them. They were unpalatable because he had no palate to catch their exquisite flavor; they were dull because their light could not contract itself into the scope of his limited vision; they were mountains which he could not climb, rivers which he was incapable of fording, seas which he had no sail to brave. They bored him, but he venerated them; and it often seemed to him that if the fact of their boring him should be known he would almost die of shame.

But when Sadie put "Rachel Rand" into his hands, and said: "Oh, just read it, and tell me if you don't think it's perfectly lovely," all was changed with Clarry. The new book was as different from its predecessors as a blossoming garden from a hot-house full of glacial camellias. At least Clarry had certainly found it so. Its love-passages stirred his pulse and moistened his eyes, while the treasured Sadie seemed to look up at him from many a printed page. Its narrative charm, natural and yet romantic, held his interest by a stout bond; its humor insisted upon his smile;

its philosophy (which he but half comprehended) bore a crispness that made it as pleasant reading as if it had been pure sentiment only. Poor Clarry had never been so enthralled by any book since he had read, at a considerably earlier age, "The Three Guardsmen" and "The Wandering Jew." But he had read these famed volumes in a wholly different way, and without knowing it he had been so stamped, in his later life, by the altered mood and need of his time, that he would no longer have enjoyed them half as much as he now enjoyed the human realisms of "Rachel Rand."

Inevitably, therefore, the maker of this fascinating marvel became an object of increased reverence. The great author had permitted himself to be not alone thoroughly understood but thoroughly sympathized with as well. Clarry unconsciously began to regard Sadie's father as one who from heights far beyond him had deigned once to descend, and for his own personal delight and indulgence. He could not escape this feeling, though he never put it into an actual concept. It abode with him, however, and made him perhaps one of the most zealous devotees whom the novel had yet secured.

"It's taking everywhere, I guess," he now said, nodding intimately to Mrs. Coggeshal, who had just referred to it and who was always very far indeed from awing him. "Everybody in our bank

has either read it or is reading it." Here he turned to Mr. Coggeshal, again oblivious of Sadie's injunction. "It must be gratifying to you, sir," Clarry continued. "Of course your reputation was a dead sure thing before, and all that, sir, but to have an effusion from a talented pen catch on with everybody, as this effort has done must seem . . . seem kind of new. Don't it, sir?"

The respectful trepidation that went with these words made their attempt at eloquence just as noticeable as their spontaneous out-crop of slang. Clarry could never quite control his slang; it was a part of his being, as it was nearly all of his daily association.

"Yes, it does seem new," said Coggeshal kindly. "I hardly expected it." There he stopped short.

"Papa doesn't think it by any means his best novel," said Sadie proudly.

"Is that so?" asked Clarry, who had heard the same remark from his beloved more than once in private, but who now felt relief in turning familiarly toward the one dearest member of this august family by which he had been honored in so signal a way.

"It's more suited to the popular taste," Sadie went on, as though she were repeating something learned accurately beforehand, "but it has not the same solid merit as papa's other books."

"Oh . . . ah . . . I presume so," replied Clarry, in tones of the deepest respect.

"I don't know anything about solid merit, *I'm* afraid," here announced Mrs. Coggeshal, in her voluble, meandering way. "I don't say that I oughtn't to, living all this time as the wife of an author so . . . well, so *up* in almost everything as . . . Mr. Coggeshal is." She was going to say "as pa is," but checked herself; for Isabel had long ago warned her against speaking of her husband as "pa" — a tendency no less strong from sheer force of early habit than was that of Clarry to say "sir" from replete and overwhelming respect. "But I just don't," proceeded Mrs. Coggeshal. "I guess I never could fathom those other things." Here she caught her husband's mild gaze, across the table. "Now what are you *looking* at me for?" she exclaimed, with a girlish abandonment which she had always given vent to at certain times, and which always had in it a tameness like that of a kitten's paw-stroke. "You know just as well as you know you're sitting there, Herbert Coggeshal, that those books never *did* suit an every-day person like me. How could they? But this *last* one" —

"Mamma, you mustn't make confessions like that," broke in Isabel, with a weary ring in her voice that she sought to hide by gayety. "You must go about saying that every thing papa has ever done is perfection, and that 'Rachel Rand' can't hold a candle to any of his other books. Whatever your real opinions are, for the sake



of the family you must learn policy and be circumspect."

Clarry laughed quite loudly, at this, though even while he did so he mentally decided to look up the exact meaning of the word "circumspect" in a Webster's dictionary which he had found reason to purchase since his engagement.

"How is that, Belle?" asked Sadie, with loitering reflectiveness. "I suppose you mean it will make the other books have a better sale. But if so, why doesn't papa write to the papers and state that he thinks this work inferior to his former ones?" Sadie now turned toward her father. They were not ever on intimate terms, as might be said; for years he had recoiled from her petulance and wilfulness as a child, and afterward he had repeatedly told Isabel and his wife that he "could make nothing of that girl." As two people will do when they have once started all wrong in their mutual relations, these two were forever misunderstanding, affronting and pricking one another, either with intention or without it. Sadie always altered her voice when she spoke to her father; its tone was now cold and constrained as she said: "I believe you did tell us that you place your last novel below all those you wrote before."

"Did I say that?" Coggeshal answered, crumbling a piece of bread between thumb and finger, and seeming almost to address his own thoughts.

Sadie immediately looked hurt. Often indeed had that look crossed her face before. Even Clarry had seen it, though to him it was steeped in the golden languor of poesy, as the pout of a mistress must always be to a lover. Still, there is no doubt that Sadie was possessed of that peculiar unamiable nature which none but a person of wide repute for amiability can successfully develop.

"Of course you said it, papa," replied Sadie, with the tips of her lips, so to speak.

Coggeshal started a little, and assumed a propitiating air. All her family had long ago fallen into the habit of propitiation with Sadie. Not to do so was to run the chance of feeling for days in the domestic atmosphere that effect of dampness which can best be expressed by comparing it to a February thaw, during which the sun shines, although you set your wraps closer about your throat.

"Well, Sadie," acceded her father, "perhaps I did say it. But no doubt I was then expecting the book to prove a failure. It's highly probable that since it has done otherwise I may have altered my estimate. That's only human nature, you know."

Sadie nodded her head slowly, with a mollified little smile. And as she did so, her mother said:

"Now, Herbert, you know you never did care about what the public at large thought of your

writings. Don't let your son-in-law that's going to be, get a wrong opinion of you."

"There isn't any danger I shall!" exclaimed Clarry, with effusion. "I guess I'll only have the right opinion, every time!"

"He's *above* minding how people talk about him, or what they write, either," declared Mrs. Coggeshal to Clarry, with earnest confidence and the mien of one who is sure to meet entire sympathy. "He knows that when they can't *grasp* the productions of his intellect they'll be as apt as not to run them down, or else to say something that shows they're not even fit for praising them. So Mr. Coggeshal don't care, and I never knew him to care. *I* can't always grasp his thoughts, and Sadie can't, either, sometimes . . Isabel, *you* can, because your brain and your father's always *were* something alike. But" —

"That will do, my dear," said Coggeshal, temperately enough, at this point in his wife's progressive rhapsody; and Mrs. Coggeshal, with a meek but decided "*Very well,*" ceased from her panegyric. But she and Clarry at once exchanged a glance which indicated their perfect unison of sentiment and their appreciation of the modesty prompting greatness to shrink from undue celebration.

It woke inward wonder in Isabel that her father should now find nearly every sort of reference to his literary career odious. He had never shown vanity,

or a desire of hearing his own exploits praised ; but, as Isabel knew very well, he had by no means disliked to discuss his mental equipments and the various results with which they had been employed. And yet latterly it had proved so different with him ! Isabel made a swift attempt to permanently change the whole subject, realizing that it dealt mysterious discomfort ; and there was even a pretty touch of self-sacrifice in her slight act of rescue.

“ I’m inconsolable,” she said to Clarry, “ about our next-door divinity. He saw me on the piazza this afternoon while he was passing, and took no more notice of me than if I’d been one of the flower-beds.”

Clarry quickly became convulsed with laughter. Isabel had recently familiarized him with her dry, calm way of confessing an immense passion for the Mr. Lloyd Brockholst who lived next door and to whom she had never even spoken ; and Clarry, listening at first with consternation, had afterward done so with keenest amusement. All this kind of serio-comedy was to him an undiscovered country in the way of feminine humor. He had never before met any girl who had thus dared tranquilly to assert that she was devotedly in love, blending all the drama of emotional disclosure with the coolness of prosaic statement. At first he had had strong misgivings as to whether Isabel were not thoroughly serious ; but afterward, on

discovering her hyperbole to merely mean a high-flown manner of saying that Mr. Lloyd Brockholst pleased her by his appearance and that she would like to become acquainted with him, Clarry was none the less diverted.

"Oh, Belle," said Sadie, brightening a little, in her lifeless way, "how can you talk so dreadfully! Clarry believes you. Don't you, Clarry?"

"No," responded Clarry, still giggling. "I used to, almost; but I don't now. I see the joke."

"It's no joke," said Isabel, with the faintest betrayal of a smile on her lips. "It's tremendously the opposite." She quietly glanced at her father. "Tell him, papa, how wild I am," she said, with the utmost composure, "about this fascinating neighbor of ours."

"We don't know what we shall have to do with her," said Coggeshal, looking at Clarry, while a spark of humor, which Isabel loved to see, crept into his pensive eyes. "She appears to be in a low condition of frenzy, for the present harmless."

"Precisely," said Isabel, with great demureness.

"Oh, Belle," exclaimed her mother, "do stop! you've only just found out his name."

"I know," admitted Isabel; "but I'd adored him three days before I knew it." At this point Clarry gave a loud cry of laughter; it all struck him as so marvellously funny.

"Will you stop, Belle?" called Mrs. Coggeshal,

laughing too. "Clarry'll go and tell his mother and sister. The *idea!* Of course you don't mean it. Your father only got his name from that Mr. Carolan about two days ago. I guess you must be pretty hard up for a sweetheart to carry on as you're doing!"

"I am," said Isabel, without changing the play of a muscle. And this drove Clarry into another spasm of merriment.

But just then the servant who had been waiting upon them at dinner, handed Isabel a note. She took it surprisedly — so few notes of any sort ever reached her, here at High Bridge — and after she had glanced through its contents her face began to tell rather rosy tales.

"Who's written, Belle?" asked Sadie. "Is it Mrs. Bondurant?"

"Yes," answered Isabel. "She wants me to meet" — Here she paused, and looked at Clarry. "My adored being," she continued, without the least smile. "He is to be there this very evening at eight." She sighed, rather preposterously, as her blush departed. "I wonder if I shall have strength to go and meet him," she proceeded, "at Mrs. Bondurant's? What do you think, papa?"

"Oh, we'll try and fortify you up to it," said her father.

"So you're really going to be introduced, Belle!" cried Mrs. Coggeshal, in her voice that always had its feeble, insecure ring, without re-



gard to the sense it conveyed. "Who knows what *may* happen, after all! Do let me see Mrs. Bondurant's note."

Isabel tossed the note toward her mother. She tried to smile as she did so. At the same time she was rather drearily thinking how a little pleasantry amused Sadie's future husband, and how much it would take to bring back the old, familiar, happy look to her father's loved face.

## III.

COGGESHAL went out upon the piazza when dinner was over. Isabel followed him, and watched him, herself unobserved, while he stood taking several quick puffs at a cigar which he had lighted but which he presently threw away.

"You're here, are you, papa?" she then said, stepping forward and joining him, as if it were the most unforeseen thing in the world. "How much cooler it's grown, hasn't it? I suppose to-morrow will really be a cool day."

The broad avenue which the house fronted was now swept by a persistent though moderate breeze. From the piazza they could see High Bridge with its gray arches turning vague in the twilight, and the river beneath them shining softly. The foliage of the embankments had taken a most dusky tinge, but overhead the sky was filmed with a gauzy rose-color, while intervals of deepening blue showed the timid silver of one or two early stars. Lights had begun scatteredly to gleam in the vast city at the lower end of the island. Pleasantly in accord with the freshened atmosphere, sounds of music floated from the

beer-gardens not far aloof. Whichever way you looked, the lines of leafage, of valley or of acclivity were tender and yielding against the dreamy air.

"It has changed decidedly for the better," said Coggeshal, as Isabel joined him. He glanced into her face with a smile both faint and transient, but dear to her simply because it was a smile. "So you are to meet your idol this evening at Mrs. Bondurant's?" he said.

"My idol!" laughed Isabel. "Oh, papa, I fear I've carried my joke too far! Clarence Coulter was so amused by the mode of speech I adopted that I kept it up. Not that it was at all original. So many American girls have the same style of imprudent parody. That's why the foreigners who take us seriously are often so shocked."

"So, then, you're not quite forlorn about him, eh? You've been fooling a little on this question of adoration?"

"Oh, papa! you know too well that I never meant a word of it! I thought him nice-looking, and yesterday when I spoke at the gate for a few minutes with Mr. Carolan, I learned that his name was Brockholst, and that he was old Mr. Chadwick's nephew, recently returned from abroad. A girl says so many things she doesn't mean. And of course I was sure that you and Sadie and mamma understood my nonsense!"

"Of course, Belle."

"But now comes this invitation from Mrs. Bondurant for to-night," pursued Isabel, with a little excited tremor in her voice. "It makes me feel actually guilty, papa! I don't think I ought to accept it. Mrs. Bondurant is such a rattling, prattlesome kind of person that she may have told him some of the absurd things I've said."

"Ah!" replied Coggeshal dryly. "So you've been confiding your attachment to Mrs. Bondurant also?"

"Nothing of the sort! I never had the least attachment to confide! Papa, how can you! I told her I thought he had a very gentlemanlike appearance."

Coggeshal had taken Isabel's hand in his, and was holding it by the slim, flexible fingers while he watched her demure upturned face.

"There was nothing very compromising in that," he said. "Belle, my dear girl, you ought to have lots of admirers—lovers, I mean, and make your choice from among them; and the man who gets you will be lucky."

"Oh, papa, how nice of you! But I don't want any lover except yourself. Truly, I don't. I'm perfectly contented with your devotion, provided you'll always make it evident."

"You say that, dear Belle, but you'll change when your fate arrives. Go to Mrs. Bondurant's, by all means . . . I want to see Carolan this evening. I've a question I want to ask him."

"Is it any point about your new book, papa?"

"Who told you I was writing a new book?"

"Your manuscript . . . Oh, I've taken a peep at it, now and then! You don't keep it locked away mystically, as you did 'Rachel Rand.'"

"Well," said Coggeshal, after a little pause, "perhaps it *is* about my new novel. Anyway, I must see Carolan."

"It's a strange intimacy, yours and his," said Isabel. "I never could understand it."

"No?" He had dropped her hand. He moved several paces away from her, and seemed to be gazing at some unknown point of interest in the sweet, dusky landscape.

"No, papa," asserted Isabel stoutly, "I never could see why you liked that plausible, talkative Irishman. He is so different from you, with his superficial cleverness and his glib, tripping tongue."

"We often like our opposites," said Coggeshal, as he turned and passed slowly toward the hall. "Or, if we don't like them, we tolerate them, for any reason, or no reason. You tolerate Mrs. Bondurant, although, as you have often told me, you don't like her. High Bridge is not very remarkable for its abundance of society."

He disappeared in-doors, and soon afterward Isabel heard his step pause in the region of his study. She listened to hear where he went. She was always thinking of him and worrying about him, of late.

But about a quarter of an hour afterward he re-emerged upon the piazza, wearing his hat. Sadie and Clarry were seated there now, deep in the shadow dear to lovers. He passed them without a sign, and they were perhaps grateful for the avoidance. Isabel, as he took for granted, had gone to be a guest of Mrs. Bondurant, who lived but a short distance away, in one of the villas which skirted the broad avenue. As for his wife, she had stolen sleepily upstairs, fatigued with her town shopping.

Coggeshal descended the steps of the piazza, and soon found himself at the doorway of the single house nearest his own. It was a residence of more solid build than that in which he dwelt, and more suggestive of the city close at hand. It looked very dark and uninviting as he rang the bell. He rang twice before the door was opened by a man whom he instantly recognized. "Ah, so it's you, Carolan," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Coggeshal. I was upstairs, and had just put the old gentleman comfortably to bed. Glad you dropped in. Come into the sitting-room. Mr. Brockholst is out."

"No," said Coggeshal. "We'll walk a little along the avenue together, if you don't mind. It's a warm evening, and we can get more air that way. Besides, a breeze has sprung up, and we can find it better if we walk. Are you willing?"

"Willing?" said Carolan. "Certainly. Any-



thing suits me that suits you. Just wait till I get my hat. It's only here in the hall."

The speaker had a hearty, mellow, bass voice, and it suggested a man of large stature and firm health. Ample-chested, tall, springy in his gait, jaunty in his carriage, Carolan presently passed forth upon the avenue at Coggeshal's side. The dimness left it well visible that he had a face of full mould, shaven quite clean. Its plumpness could not hide its fine, true lines; its profile would have looked well in a cameo; you might have called the rounded jaws and chin sensuous, but the arch of the nose and curve of the nostrils bespoke mind and will. Such a visage as Carolan's might have belonged to the English Regency, and the short curls that pushed densely and crisply below his hat-brim at either temple perhaps helped to suggest, in the vague light, that period of wigs and smooth faces. There was the dry sparkle as of wit itself in his blue and rather prominent eyes, and a look about his lips of their being brisk to deal with drolleries yet in a most unsmiling way. When the Regent caroused late over his claret with Sheridan and Fox, this other merry-tongued Irishman might not have been out of place in their bacchanal company, and perhaps could have seasoned the banquet with as much Attic salt as nearly any of the band; for he shone with that rollicking geniality which forms, when it is allied to intellect, one of the chief attractions of his pe-

culiar race. But Carolan had his gloom as well as his sunshine, and they who would lightly have ranked him as a light personage might later have learned this error to their cost. It is not always the shallow thing that flashes or the weightless thing that floats.

"I haven't seen you for several days, Carolan, have I?" said Coggeshal, and they walked slowly along together. The words had somehow a portent in them as of some anxious pending question.

"No, Mr. Coggeshal," replied his companion, with the ever profuse geniality. "That's a fact, sir — you haven't." Carolan seemed to reflect for a moment. "I meant to drop over, but the old gentleman has kept me a good deal with him lately. His gout was bad one day, and his spirits were worse the next, and there were matters of rents and mortgages to be got through with the next, — and so it went on. . . But I wanted to look you up. I'd have come over to-night, perhaps, if you hadn't called. I saw Miss Isabel, by the way, for a few minutes, yesterday."

"You met her. Yes, she said so."

"She was looking very well, Mr. Coggeshal. I don't think I ever saw her looking better. . Yes, yes. . . It was just near your house; did she tell you? Ah, yes, excuse me; I believe you said that she told you."

Coggeshal made no reply. He had drooped his head a little; he seemed lost in thought. He was

too absent to notice a furtive look that Carolan now quickly gave him, as they still strolled onward.

"She didn't ask me in," said Coggeshal's friend, with a passing note or two of his rich, unctuous laugh; for if a smile was rare with him a laugh was not. "No, she didn't ask me in, Miss Isabel. I confess that I might have gone if she had done so. I usually do whatever Miss Isabel requires of me — when I can. But opportunities, in this respect, are limited."

"Ah?" said Coggeshal, coming to himself, as it were. . "Belle would have been very glad to ask you in, if" . . he paused, in his desire to be conventionally civil . . "if she had thought you cared about it."

"I did care about it," said Carolan, putting his hand on Coggeshal's shoulder. "I always do when she is good enough to think asking me worth her while."

Coggeshal seemed to take this airy, amiable profession quite for granted. No doubt he ranked it, carelessly enough, among the pleasant things that were always being blown, like little iridescent bubbles from the Irishman's affable discourse. He had never reflected at all as to how much Carolan liked his daughter, though he had heard rather broadcast praise and compliment paid Isabel from this same fluent source. But suddenly he remembered in what slight esteem the girl herself held

him who had just mentioned her, and this consideration perhaps wrought its effect upon the quality of his reply.

"Oh, drop in any time," he said. "We're always glad to see you."

Carolan, far keener under his outward blandness and good-fellowship than many people gave him credit for, caught on an instant the off-handed evasion of this little speech. He may even have speedily divined its precise reason for utterance. He was very much in love with Isabel Coggeshal, and so could weigh as by the most delicate scales whatever bore upon one precious question. He had made up his mind a good while ago that Isabel rather disliked him than otherwise, and pangs of passion had been cost by this realization. But he was a man who could plot and ponder and wait where it was a case of certain valued results accruing; and of late he had carefully done all three.

Just now he chose to change the subject, and to use a sympathetic frankness in saying: "I felt interest, of course, about the new novel. I hope it's getting on finely."

Coggeshal at once turned to him with a bitter smile. "It isn't getting on at all," he said, low-voiced. "The truth is, Carolan, I'm paralyzed."

"Oh, bosh, now, my friend — bosh, I say! You're worth twenty more things as good as 'Rachel Rand.' That's given you a fair start — nothing else."

Coggeshal shook his head, pausing in the pathway as he did so. They had got to a part of their walk where the houses had ceased and the yellow calm of the summer stars hung without a twinkle over blank tracts of field. The band-music from the near casinos, hidden behind black slopes of leafage, came to them with an odd staccato amid the stillness. Only a fitful rustle woke now and then among the trees that clung so densely all down the bend of the land till it met the river-bed below; but even then, faint and transient as was the movement of the boughs in the night-wind, it held that wistfulness of harmony than which there is hardly any other more potent in all the sounds of nature. Its plaintiveness—which might be made to stand, in the broad symbolism of all music, for a remorseful sorrow after some irremediable sin,—Carolau was not without the fancy to which analogies like these are easy, for duly recognizing; and as a long sigh from the wind-stirred foliage came fluttering to his ears, he was by no means below discerning soft correspondence between such æolian minor-chords of pathos and the pale, troubled face now turned full toward his own. New lines, as of suffering, seemed abruptly to have deepened under Coggeshal's eyes and about the corners of his lips; the pallor of the light that struck his features from what glow still brooded above the dead June sunset, gave them unwonted haggardness.

"A fair start!" he repeated, with dismal irony. "Why, the success of that book, Carolan, has somehow told me that I wrote my own death warrant when I put my own name to it. I despised doing it—I shrank from doing it—I told myself that to do it would be horrible and vile. And yet the opportunity hung ready, like the cord of a bell that we can set ringing by a touch."

Carolan gave a low laugh, that had, for him, an uncomfortably harsh vibration. "But you rang the bell—and its peals haven't stopped yet," he said.

"Say its knell, Carolan—its knell over a ruined manhood!"

"Stuff and nonsense! If the story hadn't had the great go it's achieved, you'd have looked on the appropriation of it as your own in the light of mere clever literary fooling."

"Never as anything so harmless," murmured Coggeshal, scanning the dark path beneath him. "No, never—as I was once an honest man! . . . The sting of repentance must always have come. I think I felt what that sting would be before I sent 'Rachel Rand' to the typewriter—before I wrote my name on its first sheet—before I let the temptation grow into crime. I think I felt, in warning, in . . . in a kind of lurid expectancy, just what my present self-contempt would be. But with all that sure consequence before my . . . my moral vision, I—well, I accepted this torture that I'm undergoing now."



Carolan made an impatient gesture and walked away several paces. But he returned quickly, and put his hands on either of the wretched man's shoulders, trying to peer into his drooped face.

"Come, now, Coggeshal," he said, with a rough joviality and bluntness which had long ago made him pass current in the big misled world as "the best fellow going," or something equally distant from the astute and deliberative personality that he really was. "Own up that when I showed you the manuscript of that novel, you thought it might push you a little ahead in popular favor, and nothing more. It would make people begin to read you, you reflected, and discover that you were worth reading. It had elements that were touched with a tarnish of cheap writing here and there, you thought, but it had certain merits that you would not be at all ashamed to father. It wasn't the book that you could ever have just found the inclination to write, but it was a book, nevertheless, which had in it not a few things clearly up to your standard, your ideal. You would appear to stoop a little for the time, and when you rose again you would rise to the heights of your actual self in letters—heights whither you wished a little select company of constituents to follow you. But that was all. You were prepared to have this novel which you *didn't* write mildly forgotten in the handsome appreciation of those which you *had* written, or would write here-

after. You proposed to use 'Rachel Rand' as a slim but trustworthy ladder for yourself and your new cliency to mount on. But instead of being a mere ladder, she's turned out to be an infernal stumbling-block! And why? She's become a prodigious favorite; she's irritated you into believing that the public will like you only as a maker of future novels exactly in this same vein. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ!* as the newspapers say, when they want to behave as if they knew Latin. You can't write novels exactly in this same vein. But you can write something that may win people to accredit you with a power that's truly your own, guided into such acceptance of you by the success of 'Rachel Rand.' And there isn't any earthly reason, my friend, for the success of 'Rachel Rand' to breed in you this anguish of remorse." Here Carolan paused a minute, and met the grave gaze that Coggeshal lifted to him. "Good God, man," he went on, "it's a safe secret! I hope you don't think otherwise!"

Coggeshal smiled the sort of smile which looks as if the lips clung dryly to the teeth in making it. "You read me pretty well," he said gloomily. "I did think all that. It's why I befouled myself. And I won't deny that I feel blacker in soul because everybody is now talking of the book and buying it — the book that I did not write a line of, except to change its title and the names of its characters. But, as I said, my conscience would

have stung and stabbed me — perhaps not as it is doing now, but still with enough force to suffer by. . This is matter for a man's moral sense, Carolan." Here the speaker showed a flurried, hunted, querulous look, and added sharply: "I sometimes think you haven't a damned bit of moral sense, you, yourself! I do, indeed!"

Carolan's face flushed in the dubious starlight. He was always affronted by reckless personalities. He never gave them unless under severe protest, and they always cast into disarray his well-ordered light-infantry of *bonhomie*.

"Perhaps I'd respect the impertinence more," he said, with speed and a plain sneer, "if I didn't know quite so well the person who pays it."

Coggeshal gnawed his under lip for a second or two. The slur had told. It was the first one, moreover, that his crime had thus far engendered, and it held the bitterness of woful prophecy. It pointed to a future thick with just these jeers. Wrath and accusation were equally in his tones as he now retorted:

"I date all my dishonor from the time when you first tempted me to become a thief."

Carolan threw back his head, and laughed with cold derision. "There's downright language," he exclaimed, "if it was ever spoken! . . . But wait a minute," he went on, suddenly slipping very close to Coggeshal and catching the lapel of his coat between firm thumb and forefinger. "Isn't

it a rather mean thing of you, now your course is taken, to throw the blame on *me*? Suppose I'd shown you an axe and said, 'Chop your hand off;' would you have done it?"

Coggeshal shook himself free of contact. "You saw how weak I was," he said, with a low gasp at the end of the brief sentence.

"Oh, I did, eh? And suppose you'd chosen to be strong. What funny law of nature made me the custodian of your conscience? Why don't you go now and tell the big sympathizing mass of your fellow-beings that you've proclaimed yourself the author of a book you never wrote, but that the atrocity was really none of your contriving? — that it was all the work of a certain plausible Irishman named Carolan, who had the villainy to storm the ramparts of your rectitude at a time when mental depression — or, let us say an attack of indigestion — made them ill-defended? Do it — why, don't you? — just for an experiment! You might get complete exoneration (who knows?) at the hands of outraged society. I advise you at least to try the plan."

This merciless mockery seemed to quiet its hearer. "Pray drop that strain," he said, presently, in an altered and much more placid voice.

"So I will," shot Carolan, with tart sullenness, "when you cease to talk like a madman."

Coggeshal gave a long, heavy sigh, which the pensive ripple of the breeze in the leaves appeared

to take up and reduplicate far away down the hillside.

"I *feel* like a madman — sometimes," he faltered, in complete dejection, now.

"Quite credible. But I confess that your moods of sanity, when I'm fortunate enough to meet them, please me the most."

"I — I didn't come to you for the purpose of idle wrangling."

"That's pleasant intelligence, certainly. I'm refreshed to obtain it. I feel relieved of a rather awkward doubt to the contrary."

"I — I wanted to ask you about this nephew of Mr. Chadwick's."

Carolan was easing himself back into his customary urbanity; his ruffled plumes were getting sleek again. "I'll give you any information," he volunteered, "that my own very limited data will allow."

They had begun to walk on again. "He is just back from Europe?" asked Coggeshal.

"Lloyd Brockholst? Yes. He's lived there for ten years. I don't think he would ever have returned at all if it hadn't been for his uncle's half-imbecile state and Mr. Chadwick's entire lack of all blood-relations in this country. People will say, of course, that the old gentleman's money was a potent incentive. But I don't believe a word of it."

"He has a fortune already, this nephew?"

"He has about fifteen thousand dollars a year, and is the sort of man you'd more than suspect of an unmarried future. Three years ago, when Mr. Chadwick's memory had not so many of the murky intervals that often visit him now, he told me this little fact about his nephew's income."

"And is he to be long at High Bridge?"

"I think he means to remain here as long as his uncle does; and I dare say Mr. Chadwick will die here in a very few years—or months. But Lloyd Brockholst means to stay until the end. In his quiet, reflective way he told me only yesterday that if he had known his uncle's truly pitiful state he would have crossed the ocean some time ago. 'Mr. Chadwick,' he added, 'was my mother's only brother, and I am sure that if she were living now it would be great pain for her to see him as he is, but greater pain not to see him constantly, not to make his last days warm with the care and the companionship of near kindred.' So as a matter of duty, if nothing else, Mr. Brockholst will remain at High Bridge."

"He looks like a man of the world," said Coggeshal, with something tentative in his tones.

"He is one. He's still water, I should fancy; he has his depths and silences. A trifle disappointed by the whole human scheme, very possibly, but with not enough vanity to deplore his own absence at creation. Outward conventions come easy enough to him; he was educated at a Swiss



college and has seen some of the best English and European society. He has never done anything in his life, but he throws a good deal of neat dignity into his idleness, somehow."

"Fond of books; eh?"

"French and German ones — yes. I never see him reading any but those. He brought a lot of them up here, and others have been sent him since his arrival. I suppose he will bore himself mightily before long; it seems to me that such a man must, in such a place. But it's more than likely that he'll slip into apartments in town after a few weeks, and merely pay visits, now and then, upon his invalid uncle. That's the most natural course to be expected of him. He mentioned one or two of the fashionable New York clubs to which he had been invited since his arrival. No doubt he'll be made a permanent member, soon, of at least one of them. The nobs and swells always take up a man like that, you know, in New York. He's well-born — what you Americans would call very well-born, I should judge. The Chadwicks and Brockholsts have been leading people for a number of generations, I believe. Perhaps some one of the many lovely girls here will ensnare him with her pretty sorceries before a great while. I find that most male Americans who have the matrimonial pick usually take a bride of their own nationality; it seems to be only girls of the same fortunate standing who marry unpatriotically."

Coggeshal kept silent for a little while, and when he next spoke it was in a voice full of that solemn anxiety which his words at once explained.

"Tell me, Carolan: do you think he has read, or will read, 'Rachel Rand'? It was because of this thought, this dread — which I have had ever since learning he had come here to his uncle's house — that I sought you to-night."

Carolan made an impatient noise with his full, ruddy lips. "Bah, Coggeshal!" he exclaimed. "And what if the book were read by him twenty times over? You don't — you *can't* think, in all the conceivable absurdity of your nervousness, that he would ever remotely surmise it wasn't yours!"

"You found it among his uncle's old papers, in that big chest of rubbish, you know," began Coggeshal, faintly and forlornly.

"Yes. Well? And if I did? Pray, what then?"

The hesitant, insecure answer came in the form of a question. "Was not this nephew in New York at any time while a young man?"

"Oh, yes. I should say that he was about eight-and-thirty now, if a day, and I think that ten years ago he spent three or four years in this country."

Coggeshal quickly nodded his head. "There — you, see," he said; . "I've reason to fear. . Oh, you may call it foolish, Carolan, but I can't

help wondering if that poor devil, Arthur Lawton, whose letter you found with the manuscript, and of whom we're both sure that he died a miserable unfriended death years ago, may not have been known to Lloyd Brockholst—may not have . . .”

Carolan broke into laughter, as his companion paused. “I think I’ve a full perception of your bugaboo,” he said, with a tripping kind of ridicule that carried only comfort to his miserable auditor. “Brockholst may have known all about the story, of course. It is so excessively probable that Andreas Chadwick, his uncle, who was then an elderly man about town, and received from a starving poet named Arthur Lawton a manuscript which the old gentleman doubtless never did much more than glance at, should have begged his nephew to read and decide upon its claims. Oh, yes, I’ll grant your terror this one probability, and I’ll even admit that it is extreme. But suppose Lloyd Brockholst did really read the thing. How about his remembering that he either skimmed or waded through its very bad hand-writing ten years ago? Won’t you grant that he might, by some unique mental accident, have forgotten it, even if he did read it? Or is that making too great a demand upon your credulity?”

Coggeshal would have liked the speaker to go on in this strain almost indefinitely. The sarcasm employed was only pleasantly irritant when con-

trasted with the dull ache that its tingle slightly relieved. "I can't see how it would be strange if Brockholst should remember the book, provided he had seen it of old," came the gloomy, lingering response. "Discovery might set in that way as quickly as by any other. There is no getting over the fact that pairs of eyes besides our own have looked upon Arthur Lawton's manuscript."

"Pshaw! and these pairs of eyes, *except* ours and Chadwick's, are all long ago in the grave."

"You said that very confidently when I last saw you," sped Coggeshal's next words. His eager, scanning look into Carolan's face — as though to assure himself that the Irishman's consolatory assertion was wholly spontaneous and genuine, told of many a distrustful qualm. "You think, Carolan, don't you, that if any one had wanted to set the Hudson on fire over 'Rachel Rand's' authenticity, he . . ."

"He'd have started his conflagration several weeks ago," affirmed Carolan, not interrupting but ending this last laggard and brooding sort of sentence. "I say, will you come over the bridge here and get a glass of beer? It will cool us both off, and brighten up at least one of us, who needs brightening."

They had almost reached the large wooden causeway over whose planks the wearied feet of Mrs. Coggeshal and Sadie had passed but a few hours ago. They could see the showy lights

from the nearest casino, and could hear more loudly the music whose brassy vigor most aptly suited their bold rays. People in twos and threes were moving not far away amid the darkness, like strayed revellers, dim as the figures in a dream. Far beyond, they could see the city, magnificent for its vagueness and suggestion as any Babylon of old, and looking like an immense cluster of stars that had dropped upon the dusky land.

"No," said Coggeshal. "I can't go into those hot places. I'm too nervous. The music tries me, with its coarse shrieks, and besides, I can't drink beer; it always disagrees with me — brings on dyspepsia and headache. Let's turn back."

"Oh, as you will," Carolan acquiesced; and when they had got where it was quite placid and retired again, where the tumults of the band had become mellowed by the enchantment of distance, and you could hear the sleepy billowings once more of the night wind among the trees, he carelessly added: "If you *will* go on eating your heart out for no earthly reason, why, do it, my friend. That's a kind of funeral-dirge, you understand, at which no one pays the fiddler except one-self."

"True enough," came the almost sighed answer.

Carolan kindled, now, into his accustomed fervor.

"Grant," he softly cried, "that somebody *does* declare you stole the book. It's a question of proof — of document. I gave you the manuscript,

did I not? You copied it, and burned it afterward."

"Yes, yes," hurried Coggeshal, bristling at once, and as if bent on clearing this point of some cobweb-like uncertainty. "I burned it to ashes — ashes!" He repeated the word "ashes" several times, with much lower intonation, even after Carolan had begun to speak again.

"Very well. You've all the battle on your side, if battle there should ever be. But there never will be any, at this late day. You might have one foe, and a dangerous one — but he's all."

"Andreas Chadwick?" swiftly questioned the other, as if he were sure and yet not quite sure of the answer.

"Of course. Who else?" Here Carolan paused for an instant. Then he let one of his laughs, moderated from its familiar allegro, softly enmesh while not retarding his few next words. "Except your very humble servant, no one has the least real power at all to give you away."

"Give me away? You?" murmured Coggeshal, looking full at the obscured face so near him. "Well," he went on, with a drowsy humor, "you've more or less said I was a fool to-night, but I'll draw my line of folly, if you like, at not being afraid of you."

"That's wise, Coggeshal. It shows an economy of solicitude that I hardly dared expect in you. You see, I know so much."



Acquainted with the speaker as he was, something in that ending sentence made Coggeshal start a little. He presently peered into the Irishman's face and said :

"Oh, if it comes to that, I don't know that you know so much. I mean, of course, in . . in a practicable way. I—I mean, in other words, if you should ever wish to betray me."

"I betray you! What an idea!" But Carolan's tones altered perceptibly as he finished. "My powers as an informer are my own, and it's to be hoped they'll remain so."

"What are these powers?" came the instant question, rather harshly.

"Why, if nothing else, the two or three letters you sent me before you decided to turn the abominable person you insist upon declaring yourself."

"So you didn't destroy those letters? Eh?"

The question came swift and sudden. Perhaps Carolan drooped his eyes a little in the gloom. "Did I say that I didn't destroy them?" he laughed, and with an effect of slyness and mischief wholly amiable.

"*Did* you destroy them?" Coggeshal urged.

"Certainly."

"It was only common prudence to have done so. If you had lost them, who can guess what awkward disclosure might have come of it? Indeed, for that matter, with human life as uncertain as it is, you might have died suddenly. Oh,

yes . . by all means those letters should have been made way with. I'm very glad you've done it, Carolan, — as you say you have. It was imprudent enough for me to write them . . though, when I did write them, I was playing with temptation; I hadn't yielded to it; I—I had seizures of it, so to speak, like a man with chills, who wonders on his well day how he could possibly have been so ill the day before."

All this was delivered in a hasty and fluttered style, quite different from the demeanor with which he now measuredly and a little crisply continued. "As for this whole question of my being in danger from *you*, I can't say that I just understand why you brought it up. And you did bring it up. You'll not deny that you did, I imagine."

"It brought itself up," said Carolan evasively.

A longer silence now followed on Coggeshal's part than his associate was exactly prepared for. It was not Carolan's intention to change the present subject, which might lead to the revelation of that firm, insistent attitude he was bent upon sooner or later assuming when the false cloak of friendship should be flung aside to show the stiletto of treachery glittering beneath it. Still, he did not wish to press matters unduly. He was not at all hardened against the pathos of Coggeshal's insecurity; he would have assured you (and with no little truth) that he was not hardened

against any thing or any body. Only, in this affair of pretended authorship there was unfortunately a certain exercise of menace and compulsion which must be inflexibly undertaken. Just when the time for undertaking it would be ripe, Carolan had not yet determined; but its proper maturity was not far off. Let Coggeshal receive one keen initial hint to this effect that very evening; — why not? If the first preparatory cut of the blade dealt a fierce pang, the remaining operation might be less painful by contrast. He hoped that it would. He desired that all which fate (as he might have put it) forced him to do, should be done as pleasantly, as smoothly, as possible. But he meant that it should be done.

Coggeshal did not abandon the subject. On the contrary, he at length presented it in a new light — and perhaps a rather lurid one. He turned presently to Carolan, and said with tones that held both irritation and alarm:

“Carolan, there’s something behind all this. You’re keeping something hidden. I don’t know that you haven’t been keeping something hidden all along.”

Here was just the turn that Carolan would have wished their talk to take.

“What could I have been keeping hidden?” he asked.

Coggeshal folded his arms and stood still in the dusky light, facing his questioner.

“That you wanted to place me in your power — and hold me there, perhaps — for some purpose of your own.”

Those few words gave Carolan a kind of glad catching of the breath. “It has come at last,” he thought, and coolly prepared his answer.

## IV.

THAT answer, when he framed it, proved brief enough. "After you think more calmly over what you have said, I feel sure that you will admit you have just insulted me."

"Pshaw! I meant to get at the truth. I meant no mere insult — if you put it in that way."

"I do put it in that way. I don't see any other rational way to put it in." Carolan had lowered his tones, and they conveyed either feeling or the semblance of feeling. "If you accuse me of wishing to place you in my power," he continued, "you can have but one reason for such an accusation or for such a belief."

"One reason?" Coggeshal repeated,

"Yes. You must have seen that I love your daughter, Isabel."

"You!" The father of Isabel drew backward several paces, in sheer consternation, while he pronounced this one short word. No announcement could have been to him more sharply surprising.

"I have loved her," said Carolan, with perfect simplicity of confession indicated by his composed

yet earnest voice, "since almost the first time that I ever saw her. Above everything else in the world, I should like to make her my wife. It is needless to add that I have never told her of this wish. I am convinced, as perhaps you are, that her reply would be adverse. If she does not roundly dislike me, she at least holds me in very slight regard."

Coggeshal seemed now to find his voice with some effort, if not actual difficulty. "You are right," he said. "She does regard you in this way. I happen to know it. Besides, you are —" and here he very suddenly paused.

Carolan waited, looking most steadily into the dimmed face. He made the silence following that pregnant pause as significant as his own silence could make it. And then he said slowly, putting the fragmentary sentence into what appeared a deliberated question: "Besides, I am . . . ?"

"You are not the man," supplied Coggeshal, with merciless candor, "whom I would desire my daughter to marry."

Carolan nodded, broke into a laugh, and then began, while his first word cut the laugh dead: "So you take that line with me, do you? All right. Well, now, listen: I love your daughter, Isabel, so much that I think I could make her the best of husbands. And I don't at all despair of being that to her at some future time. If you're not with me in this idea —"



"I am *not* with you!" broke in Coggeshal, haughtily and austere, "and never shall be!"

"No?" said Carolan, tranquilly enough. He turned away, walking several steps along the path. Then he veered round, and by some effect of recession or of the reflected starlight, Coggeshal saw his face more clearly than he had seen it since they had thus walked together. It was paler than ordinary, and the little jovial wrinkles under his eyes looked mystically smoothed down past all hint of appeal; one would never have suspected a trace of jollity in his even composure of visage.

"I did not destroy those two letters," he said, as serenely as if he were bidding a good-night. "I have them yet—both of them. Pray think over all that I've told you this evening. I want to keep friends with you. I should be very sorry not to do so. But—I retain those two letters, and I am in love with your daughter, Isabel."

He passed rapidly into obscurity, leaving Coggeshal not far from his own gate.

And Coggeshal, having heard every word of this extraordinary farewell as we hear all things that hurl defiance and challenge, no matter how much in repose they are spoken, stood peering after the man with a new dread, a new misery at his heart.

He walked onward, presently, and found the shadowed gate which led to his lawn. If Sadie

and her Clarry were still seated on the piazza, just then so benignantly gloomy for lovers like themselves, he took neither note nor thought. He went straight to his study, on the ground-floor, and seated himself in an armchair, after turning high the jet of gas which had been made a mere star.

“So, then,” he muttered, locking both his hands together and staring before him at a little etching which he had picked up abroad, and which now seemed to stare back at him as a mute memory of his unsoiled past,—“so, then, the man was using me, after all! And he requires *that*—he tempted me on *that* account!”

A long sigh, partly of wrath, partly of suffering, escaped him, but his audible expression of pain ended here. Naturally enough, at such a time, his thoughts wandered among incidents which concerned a few recent weeks.

From the first this Bourke Carolan had pleased him. To the studious man, the man shy of company, the lover of solitude for its emancipations and relaxations from worldly usages, no personality is more immediately winning among his fellow-men than such a volatile and graceful one as that of Carolan. They had met as near neighbors meet, but it had depended upon the garrulous and expansive Irishman alone that their encounter should bear any more tangible result than the ordinary exchange of courtesies. But Carolan had

speedily dispelled such formal terms. He was just next door, the companion, servant, nurse and business counsellor of old Mr. Andreas Chadwick. Of course Coggeshal and he should know each other well. It was not necessary for him even to infer that he had heard of Herbert Coggeshal, the novelist. It was indeed a godsend to find any one intellectually congenial here in this rather desolate and inchoate place. He himself had once tried his pen at novel writing. Oh, yes; he had written a novel in Dublin, when he was about two-and-twenty, and had had it published as well. It had been a flat failure, just as a little book of his verses had been a flat failure the year afterward. He had recognized that creative talent wasn't in him; he had been wise; he had long ago assured himself that the laurels of literature were not for a brow like his own. They were for the real artists, the born geniuses — the Herbert Coggeshals, in short.

No innocent in the matter of chicanery and imposture, Coggeshal had recoiled not a little before these voluble advances. Indeed, he had taken so immediate a liking to his neighbor that inquiry as to Carolan's antecedents and present status was naturally undertaken with a prompt zeal. In so restricted an environment trustworthy information had not been difficult to secure. The position of old Mr. Andreas Chadwick was irreproachable. Now a semi-paralytic, scarcely ever leaving the

home which through some senile whim he had built himself here in High Bridge and which he would supposably occupy until his near death, this gentleman had once ruled as an arbiter of fashion in New York circles, and had left a repute for frivolity which might be compared to the delicate filigree on some solid and massive structure; there was so much secure and distinct reputation beneath it. And Carolan had for an appreciable time received the jaded old bachelor's intimate confidence, now fulfilling toward him, at a period of desuetude and perhaps imminent decease, the office of both friend and adviser. What recommendation could be more ample and satisfactory? It took Coggeshal only a little while to banish the least misgiving he might have felt concerning the entire probity and repute of his new attractive friend.

Carolan himself was the reverse of reticence in speaking of his own past. And he spoke with full truth. "I came," he told Coggeshal, "of good but very slim-pursed Irish parentage. My father was a Protestant clergyman in Belfast. There were fourteen of us besides myself. I would never have got the precious college education which I really attained, if a wealthy friend of my father, who owed him a good turn, had not paid it back in this wholesome fashion. But after leaving college I had to shift for myself. I shifted with a vengeance. In Dublin I kept

incessantly vacillating between tutorship and journalism. But journalism and not tutorship was my admired cult. Like so many of my race who can wield a facile pen, I woke up to the fact—the stupendous fact, I thought it then—of America. I drifted here to New York as inevitably as the steel drifts to the magnet. I found employment for a little while—and pangs of untold disappointment as well. While I was struggling along as a reporter on the New York *Asteroid* a certain scandal in high life occurred. The *Asteroid* wished to ‘work up’ the scandal, with a flourish of accurate information that should send its contemporaries into ignominious shade. This tendency toward bold and gelid personal exposure on the part of American newspapers was just then beginning to be sanctioned and recognized. The whole abominable idea had been borrowed from certain London journals which had reaped fat profits from the violation of individual and domestic privacies. As it chanced, a certain bachelor beau, at the Metropolitan Club in New York, was believed to know more about the particular scandal under popular discussion than anybody not directly and painfully interested in its developments. The name of this gentleman was Mr. Andreas Chadwick, and fate, with her usual random appointments, fixed upon me as the special hack-emissary of the *Asteroid* who should approach and interview this

valuable personage. I shall never forget the freezing reserve with which Mr. Chadwick received me, one evening, in the visitors' room of the Metropolitan Club. But in less than ten minutes I had somehow won him over and handsomely conquered him. He has liked me, indorsed me, ever since that hour. My path hasn't been wholly strewn with roses, however; don't for an instant imagine that it has. I am the old gentleman's ostensible favorite and counsellor, but like a good many other powers behind the throne I am constantly taught to realize that the throne is most materially in front of *me*. For three or four years my position was much more endurable than now. I was blamed for everything, from the insolvency of a tenant to the incorrect ironing of a shirt. 'Bless my soul, Carolan — what the devil does this mean, sir?' had become one of those commonplace expectations which rank themselves with a rainy day or an effete appetite for breakfast. But I didn't mind it. Mr. Chadwick, with his caprices, his laziness, his inconsequential scoldings, his methodical club-habits which made him like a man out of some American Thackeray, was nevertheless a resident of New York. Until he fell ill and took the fancy of living here at High Bridge, I was consoled for all my annoyances by the fact that I dwelt in New York. I've never been in London; I don't know anything on the other side more comprehensive as regards a city



than dear old Dublin. But I've found from the first that New York is a very adequate substitute for dear old Dublin. I felt that I was hardly treated when the old gentleman moved me up here. And now that he's grown nappy and decrepit and weak-witted, I begin to feel like a hired attendant in a rural sanitarium, with ambitions transcending his dull daily routine."

Such breezy confidences as these on the part of Carolan—reposed with an accompaniment of copious and effusive suavity—attracted Coggeshal more than he at first even privately conceded. He introduced the Irishman to his family with a pride in so positive a social discovery amid such a recognized wilderness. But although Mrs. Coggeshal and Sadie pronounced him "funny" and "nice" and "good company," it was soon evident that their conquest had been only partial. Carolan was above their mental calibre. He said things that they understood and laughed at, but he said other things that kept their faces quite sober while they perhaps may have felt that there were occult reasons why they should laugh most heartily. Yet with Isabel it was wholly different. Her chief comment was—"He rings false, papa;" and after hearing this oftener than pleased Coggeshal's self-love as the indorser and introducer of Carolan, the animadversion of his younger daughter roused in him a pique which Isabel answered merely with retorts of pregnant silence.

But Coggeshal began to remember Isabel's decision when it became a question of secretly appropriating as his own the manuscript novel now known to the world as "Rachel Rand." The admirer of Carolan had felt no least faint thrill of temptation at the beginning of it all. Carolan had brought over the glazed, clammy bulk of rather ill-written foolscap, and had read aloud several passages from its contents. The story told regarding just how it had been chanced upon was a moderately true one. Mr. Chadwick's adherent had found it in a chest of old forgotten newspapers, magazines, receipted bills, and all the similar results of a long experience like that of his employer. It was entirely without signature of any sort, but as Carolan declared, a letter had been found with it from a certain Arthur Lawton to Andreas Chadwick. This letter was never shown Coggeshal, for the weighty reason that it had never existed. "I have mislaid the letter," Carolan had said, "but I think I will surely come across it again in a few days." The "few days" multiplied themselves into several weeks, but Arthur Lawton's letter never reached the hands of Coggeshal, who had meanwhile spent a good while over the manuscript, and had faithfully obeyed an explicit injunction not to let any of his household even know that he had it in his possession.

As a man who never dreams of deceit will sometimes be deceived, Coggeshal had accepted readily

enough the stipulation that he should consider the work in utmost privacy. But Carolan had not been without his diffuse explanations of why this request was made. He had learned all about the deceased Arthur Lawton, whose name he had now chosen to employ. In former times, when Mr. Chadwick's memory was not the wandering or somnolent faculty which it now by turns appeared, he had spoken at great length about Arthur Lawton, no doubt stimulated into doing so by the recognition of a clearly literary turn in his new favorite. Carolan knew well the short and unhappy term of life spent by this brilliant young Englishman in New York;—how he had come to these shores eager for success as a writer; how he had brought letters to people of position; how he had been admitted and admired, for a while, among the leaders and law-makers of society; how his beauty of person and his grace of address had won many hearts; how, in spite of his meagre purse, he might have gained and kept hosts of friends; how he had sunk through lust for drink, with gradual yet sure descent, below all possibility of reform; how he had struggled to re-secure his lost foothold, and in an interval of sobriety had appealed for aid to Andreas Chadwick; and lastly how he had received this aid only to fling away all decency, courage and manhood, mercifully dying, one day, in disgrace and shame.

Chadwick had always been fond of telling about Arthur Lawton, and long before the old gentleman himself had dropped into an irresponsible state, every detail of the ill-fated Englishman's career had undergone rather diligent repetition in the hearing of Carolan. The latter had invented that tale of the posthumous missive, but he firmly believed Lawton to have written the novel excavated from the old chest. What other literary friend save this Lawton had Mr. Chadwick ever had? How strongly probable that this luckless young adventurer himself should have confided an unprinted work into the hands of his last adherent and benefactor! In any case Carolan felt so confident of the real authorship that even Mr. Chadwick's corroboration of his views could hardly have made them more secure. In the mean time Mr. Chadwick was very far from corroborating them. The old beau was indeed a most shattered personage in this his seventy-second year. His overthrow, like everything which had ever concerned him, was picturesque and even romantic. Precisely these qualities in Carolan had pleased him and brought about their present relations. He had always been able to pardon a person a great deal if anything about him or her engaged his volatile fancy. He had liked, that evening in the Metropolitan Club, Carolan's jaunty apology for intrusion; he had liked the grace and plaintiveness mingled in this audacious

young Celt's appeal of "*Do* help me, Mr. Chadwick, for although it may be your gall and wormwood, it's my bread and butter!" He was always liking what struck him as felicitous, however superficially so, in his fellows. And now the poor old bit of decorative humanity had become afflicted with a most blurring and tenacious tarnish. He would never shine harmlessly and ornamentally again, in his old meretricious way. He sat in his wide, airy room overlooking the arches of High Bridge, and maundered dolefully about his gay past. He wore a flowered dressing-gown, when able to rise and wear any kind of garment, and a smoking-cap of embroidered ruby velvet — though he had quite lost the nerve or the palate to smoke. He rambled on about dead-and-gone Knickerbocker beaux like himself, and dead-and-gone Knickerbocker belles whom he had known and possibly made love to in his departed days, with a garrulity that sometimes keenly bored his compulsory listener. But when it came to actual facts of the past, Carolan could now get little from him that was lucid or trustworthy. He had nodded his head in a vague way when the mysterious manuscript was shown him, and had said, in answer to a direct question as to whether Arthur Lawton had written it or no: "Well, yes; I dare say he did. He sent me something like that to read, once or twice, but bless me if I just recall whether I sent the writings

back again . . or, in fact, queer as you may think it, whether they were verses or . . or prose."

From this indefinite reply Carolan had gathered new certainty. There was, of course, a risk of some other author claiming the story, were it ever printed with Coggeshal's name. But he determined to take that risk, and when he had finally prevailed upon the father of Isabel to carry out a compromising fraud of whose perfidy he alone was aware, the risk held for him merely one sharp threat of danger amid much tough surrounding warrant of safety.

At the first suggestion, clearly understood, that he should publish the manuscript as his own, Coggeshal had turned upon Carolan with a look of indignant scorn.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed, heatedly enough. "Be a lie before the world for the rest of my life! Steep myself in self-degradation! This is villanous in you, Carolan! I've almost a mind to forbid you from ever daring to address me again!"

"As you please," said Carolan, truly stung, and at once leaving him.

The Irishman had made his guileful move, and passed several days of the most acute self-reproach on account of it. He was very far from being an adept in either duplicity or knavery. He loved Isabel Coggeshal, and he had already received from the girl that kind of rebuff which



made him hopeless of winning her on grounds of purely personal reciprocated attachment. He had never loved like this before ; he had indeed never loved at all before, but he had from his early days of sentiment and of reading about sentiment more or less tropical and fervid in others, cherished the idea that he would at some future time love profoundly and passionately. He had taught his conscience the vicious theory that such a love, whenever it came, must be ranked as an impulse, a spontaneity, sacredly above all other considerations — above even honor and principle. He had been himself tempted to tempt Coggeshal, and had justified his ultimate collapse of moral regard by the glorious and dizzying reflection that he was a slave of law from which revolt would be undutiful, disloyal. All roads led to Rome for him in his crooked amatory geography, and if he was forced to take a narrow and ill-odored lane thither, so much the more circumstantially pathetic. Isabel Coggeshal, he had told himself, was measurelessly devoted to her father, his interests and fruitions and successes. If hereafter that father could be unmasked or not as a thief by a single hand only, and this hand were one which desired very greatly to slip a wedding-ring upon Isabel's, who could say what triumphant results might follow ? Carolan did not feel as if he would ever rudely force such a marriage by means of threatened betrayal ; that was too tinged

with melodrama for the proper poetry and dignity of his own passion to tolerate it. But the position of being able to force a marriage, provided he chose — the bringing of all this feminine incomppliance, all this cold virgin unconcern, under a yoke of secure subjection, according as his caprice might direct — here lay sources of stimulus whose cogency and refinement seemed equal. If Carolan deserved the downright name of rascal — and it is by no means here maintained that he deserved any other — then his rascality should be coupled with the qualifying trait of daintiness. He liked to enshroud in a prismatic mist of imaginary generosity the course he would take when it became known to Isabel that he could dishonor her father on her continued rejection of his suit. But always in the rear of such fictitious magnanimity abode a firm hope that the girl would herself make voluntary surrender. ‘As for the practical side of our union,’ he would reflect, embellishing his own future attitude as the recipient of Isabel with more of the flimsy veneer he had previously employed, ‘would I not be giving myself to an almost penniless bride? And has it not been for a long time both my ambition and my belief, with the looks and the brain and the attractiveness which I possess, to marry a woman whose dower would place me above all chances of want?’ Even in his private thoughts Carolan preferred to call it ‘dower.’

‘Dower’ pleased him much better than the tawdry commonplace of such a word as ‘money’ or ‘income.’

It has been recorded of Coggeshal that he treated with abhorrence the proposal of false appropriation first made him by his new acquaintance. He had read the manuscript with enough care to feel almost certain that it contained elements of popularity. He had said to his own thoughts, on finishing it, that although he would never care to tell a story as this one was told, and no doubt for reasons of temperament and taste could not do so if he had tried ever so hard, still, there were strong and appealing places in the work which might set it selling and indeed merited to set it selling, and to set people talking about it as well. The reflection, too, that if he himself had written some such thing with an aim at mere popularity alone it might have pushed his other books into notice and acceptance, had already entered his mind. And now the recollection that Carolan had used this same idea as an argument when openly tempting him, roused a meditative surprise even amid his anger. He wanted popularity. He had never known how to gain it; his critics had not told him; they had only told him, as their acumen was not required to do, that he had failed to gain it. But he believed stoutly in the worthiness of what he had thus far written to place him high and unassailable. Before his

wife and Isabel he had seemed careless of any reward but that of consciousness in superior achievement. Yet secretly he had chafed and fretted that this consciousness was ignored and unrecorded. He would have been satisfied if his failure to sell his novels had passed into current quotation as a proof of the unappreciative period. He had no objection to fail importantly; it was failing obscurely that vexed and depressed him. And he believed—as so many authors with all his talent and all his lack of genius have believed before him—that some random agency of accident had alone determined his present neglected fate.

But perhaps, cheered the occasional voice of hope, some cause equally fortuitous would on a sudden make his head touch the stars. He had waited long for some event like this. Thinking that he might perhaps accelerate it, he had sent copies of his books to famous men both here and in England. Not always even a reply had come to him; for there are writers of repute whose celebrity does not keep pace with their courtesy, and who are too absorbed, sometimes, by the larger moral or ethical questions to perceive that the finest kernel of their theories and principles may lurk in what we call acts of common civility. But when a reply did reach him it was always impenetrably polite and no more. He could rarely gain an inkling as to whether his gift had roused any marked admira-

tion; the longed-for word of thrilling encouragement was either not there or else it was aggravatingly smothered in a profusion of thanks. He now and then had his violent moods of sweeping cynicism, when he cried in spirit: "Curse them all! They are all alike — jealous of each new-comer till forced to admit him their peer." But such moods were infrequent, for his nature, like that of most artists who are fed by their intellectual faculties alone and divine nothing through electric flashes of sensibility or intuition, was seldom touched with any phase of excitement. Yet it could feel the slow gnaw of discouragement, and of that unappeased craving for distinction which, whether fed or no by real conquest, has the same settled belief that it deserves to be so fed. Expectation for some sort of appreciable guerdon had grown a dismal fatigue to Coggeshal at the time of Carolan's daring advance. Still pure enough in theory as regarded all trickery or falsehood where his name and place among men of letters were to be considered, he had nevertheless dealt with something for which either sincerity or self-respect would be too clean a term during his experiences on a certain commercial newspaper. Deception was not an unknown art to him; he had already more than mastered some of its oblique rudiments. For this reason, most possibly, he found his ire against Carolan fading a little more speedily than was proportionate with its first heat and blaze.

The manuscript, he began to muse, was unique in its way. Arthur Lawton was dead. To use what he had left would be like making the dead help the living. It was not, after all, such an act that a man in his own peculiar state of unacknowledged credit for superior ability as a novelist could ever feel acute twinges about it in the way of gross, cold-blooded theft. If he assumed the authorship of the story he would not be doing so with any aim toward advancing his actual merit beyond true deserts. What he had written, was written. It could speak for itself. Such a tale as this, if he should print it with his own name on the title-page, might serve like a somewhat loud and loose-tongued showman, prevailing passers to enter and inspect wares of worth and skill. This was an advertising age; his publishers had more than once assured him so; a good bit of work went begging for readers, where some other, weak enough by contrast, met wide heed through mere legerdemain of "pushing." He did not want his novels to be pushed vulgarly; they were too fine not to suffer by the inducement of a chromo or a sewing-machine as prize to every buyer — like certain newspapers he knew. But to seem as if one descended a little from one's pedestal and wrote a popular thing with some easy gush and spirit in it — this was not necessarily to drop among the masses, to desert fine principles of style and finish, to *baisser pavillon*, to confess defeat. Another book might



re-establish former tenets. And meanwhile readers would have been gained — and what novelist, or scribbler of any sort under the sun, can dispense, after all, with readers? Then, if it were to be looked at as a question of robbery, it was robbery of the dead. And how could Arthur Lawton, laid away for years in his grave, know or care? To rob a living man would be different. There you took from a sentient and striving fellow-creature what might be money in his purse or spur to his renown. But in this instance you dug his very mortality out of oblivion and quickened it by the loan of a new life. Ought not any dead man, who had failed here on this planet, to feel grateful — if any dead men can anywhere feel grateful for anything — because his own spurned and buried craft of brain has won vitality through serving the needs of a worthy survivor?

Specious arguments indeed were these — feints at exculpation made by a moral sense that quivered under admonitions of its own ruin. Coggeshal had begun to feel like one about whose body the loops of an invisible net slowly tightened. Two days after the dismissal of Carolan he sat down before his desk one day and wrote a long letter to his proscribed neighbor. This letter Carolan duly received. It was one of those which he had not destroyed.

The next day he called on Coggeshal. It chanced that on entering the house he met Isabel,

and they had a little talk together. She looked insolently beautiful, as Carolan thought, and talked to him with the tips of her lips, as it were, standing in the hall of the house and appearing cruelly enough remote from any desire to have him not remain standing as well. This circumstance may have had its weight with Carolan during the interview which followed between Coggeshal and himself. It was a long interview, and it decided nothing. But it broke ice, as the phrase goes; it ploughed new ground.

Other letters followed from Coggeshal, and very discreet responses were written him in return. The man, pausing then on the edge of an abysmal self-degradation, did not realize just how discreet these responses were. And then came another visit from Carolan, and another very long interview. All was arranged thenceforward. If there were a hell, and devils who laugh in it over the sins of earthly lives, they would have had their malign motive for mirth at that fateful hour! . . . .

"Rachel Rand" had appeared. We already know that it had circulated to an amazing degree, as the sales of books go in this country. It had shot up into thousand after thousand. Coggeshal had not once doubted that Arthur Lawton wrote it. He might have done so, however, if he had doubted Carolan's flowing statements a little more. That "mislaïd" letter of Lawton's never turned up. Carolan expressed real chagrin at the circum-

stance. A suspicion had lately come across him, he declared, that he had burned the letter by mistake with some worthless accumulated papers flung into his fire-place about a fortnight ago. Yes, he grew apparently more and more certain that its persistent disappearance could not be accounted for in any other way. But he knew the letter almost by heart; he could repeat it almost word for word. And then he made bold to "repeat" it. He had composed it and carefully learned it. A thoroughly clever composition, it avoided rousing in its auditor any preventive overplus of compassion, or making him feel that Lawton had highly valued the romance and set any great store of faith upon its future. To produce either of these two effects in Coggeshal would be impolitic, and might jeopardize the development of the plan at a most promising moment. And as it was, all had turned out surpassingly well. The forgery once committed, its extraordinary success with the world at large was held by Carolan as a new stroke of luck in his own favor. If the book had failed, or if it had only moderately caught public notice, his secret would have been of far less weight than now. But now it was of just the greater value in proportion as its disclosure could more prominently and tellingly wreck the reputation it concerned.

'But I shall never be called on to enact the informer's part,' Carolan said to himself, after he

had abruptly quitted Coggeshal, that evening, at the gate of the latter's dwelling. 'And I never would assume it, even if I were dared to do so by father and daughter both. There's what makes all my conduct in this matter so free from mere ordinary baseness. I don't want to get revenge, like the scamp in a play — not I! I only want her to think of me as a person of more importance than she has yet condescended to do. If she had ever cared for another fellow, it would be different. I should have to reckon jealousy in with the whole account, then, and I don't know just what jealousy might lead me to.' (He was not averse to imagining himself dealing a vengeance through jealousy of some rival, for that contingency had the right pardonably romantic touch; there might be coarseness in it, but there was also the poetry of a goaded anguish, of a discarded lover's headlong desperation; and all this potential line of action was so picturesquely preferable to the plain black-and-white "marry-me-or-I'll-tell" kind of tactics!) 'But there's nobody else,' his reflections proceeded, as he here passed up the steps of his employer's house, and entered by means of his latch-key (rarely enough used in so quiet a quarter) the dim hallway beyond. 'And why shouldn't she take me without knowing a bit of the real truth? Why shouldn't her father, now that I've let him see I'm in love with her, bring the whole proceeding tranquilly about? I shouldn't be at all surprised if it

happened exactly in this way. The girl loves her father well enough to look at me with changed eyes on a few meaning hints from him. She has only to look *at* me, and not above me and around me, to see that though I *am* Andreas Chadwick's factotum and hack, I'm not the sort of man for her polite avoidance. . . Well, I've taught Herbert Coggeshal a little lesson. I've shown him that there's somebody else in the world besides himself who has a purpose to serve, a mark to hit, a cause to further. What will be the result of my hardy little burst of candor to-night? Will it be war, or capitulation? Whichever it is I've one course now — to wait events.'

A little later Carolan entered a smartly furnished kind of study on the ground-floor of the house, and flung himself into a comfortable leathern chair near a central table. He was himself a devourer of books, and the table contained many besides those ranged in the low ebony cases against the walls. Andreas Chadwick had collected no mean library in his day, and this room, whither the old gentleman now seldom came, had profited much by Carolan's incessant use of it. Here were many of the current American and English magazines and reviews. They had been subscribed for in Mr. Chadwick's vigorous days, and their subscriptions were continued still. They were an immense comfort to Carolan in his leisure hours, but as he now took up one of them —

the London *Fortnightly Review*, of which he was always fond as a sturdy radical and professed agnostic—he yawned and stretched his legs and passed one of his big, strong, glossy-nailed hands weariedly through his graceful crop of blond curls, letting the familiar cream-colored volume fall idly in his lap.

He had been a confirmed Bohemian in New York, just as he had before been one in Dublin. He longed, when it grew toward the small hours, for the noisy beer-saloon in Fourteenth Street where he had sat so often and tossed off his eighth or tenth convivial glass of malt with newspaper men like himself—dramatic critics who had just scribbled denunciation of the last new play at Wallack's or the Union Square—literary critics who had perhaps come red-handed here to Theiss's for their beer after massacring this or that novelist or poet—reporters like himself, who groaned over being sent that same evening to a baby-show or a cat-show, to a prize exhibition of handsome women at a dime museum in the Bowery or a walking-match at the Madison Square Garden. Everybody had more or less grumbled at his individual fate; everybody was at once ambitious and impetuous; everybody was willing to argue and wrangle over such questions as whether Edwin Booth was or was not a great actor, whether the American dramatist was or was not hopelessly handicapped by imports of foreign plays, whether



the modern realistic school in fiction was or was not an ephemeral fashion, and so on, disputatiously and wordily, till the huge pink hams were put back into the refrigerators by sleepy waiters, and extinguished lights told that the establishment could entertain no more revellers later than its customary two-hours violation of the Excise.

Yes, Carolan missed this kind of life keenly. But for his present nearness to Isabel he would have gone back among these emancipations of town, semi-reputable though they were. Andreas Chadwick's infallible salary had grown as monotonous as the place for remaining in which he so regularly received it. The true Bohemian never growls with as much grim persistence as when he no longer has the least excuse for lamentation. His natural condition appears to be one of crushed opportunity. Enfranchise him, and he immediately feels like a captive. Do not suppose for an instant that he will ever really write the glorious American epic on Pizarro or Cortes, which he so passionately sighs for the leisure and liberty to write, provided you pension him the rest of his haphazard life-time. He can do the things that will buy him his breakfast, his *table d'hote* dinner, at Moretti's or Dennis Donovan's, his nocturnal beer in the Palm Garden or Carl Goerwertz's on Third Avenue. But his creativeness, even his mere industry, will respond to no other goad than that of necessity alone.

He presently looked down at the review in his lap, and began slowly turning its pages. He soon came to an article on a scientific subject by one of his favorites among the modern rationalistic writers. He hastily ran through the number of its leaves, as we are all apt enough to do, inquiringly rather than disrespectfully, with even our most beloved writers; and as he made this rapid examination his eye caught some lines of comment scribbled in pencil on the margin of one page.

"Brockholst's writing, no doubt," he murmured aloud. And then, having remembered for the first time that Mr. Chadwick's nephew had mentioned early in the evening an intended visit upon Mrs. Bondurant, a lady whom he had known abroad, and who now dwelt here at High Bridge, Carolan wondered whether Brockholst had provided himself with the latch-key which a servant had been ordered to deposit on his dressing-table.

But a moment afterward, having read the substance of the lines Brockholst had written, Carolan felt a peculiar lingering thrill, such as accompanies in us the totally unexpected intimation of a fact fraught with extreme surprise if not affright as well. He stared fixedly for some little time at the words which Andreas Chadwick's nephew had formed; but this hard gaze was not on account of the sense conveyed by those words.

Then he suddenly put the page very much

closer to the light, and stared at the writing still more fixedly. His face grew noticeably paler, now, as the nearer lamplight flooded it. He had seen something strange and startling.

## V.

IT had somehow been in the air of High Bridge that Isabel and Mrs. Bondurant should know each other and see considerable of each other's society. If they had both been members of the same circle in a larger community they would perhaps rarely have done more than exchange a civil word. But here there was no such thing as a circle; there were a few ladies and gentlemen among the winter-residents of the suburb who lived a tranquil, domestic and entirely unsocial life, and there were a good many other people whom it would have been rather straining a point to call ladies and gentlemen at all. Isabel was not by any means above the attractions of outward appearance, and when one day Mrs. Bondurant had joined her on the broad avenue where both their dwellings fronted and had assured her that they really ought to know each other, as they were such near neighbors, the girl felt a little tremor of sincere gratitude. She had known Mrs. Bondurant by sight for some time. The lady had a rather dapper wagonette whose one horse she often drove; the cut of her gowns could not escape Isabel; she

had seen women abroad, at one or two of the watering-places where she and her father had briefly sojourned, who had looked like this same lady, in a general sense of refined dash and vogue, and who drove themselves about with one horse, just that way. Mrs. Bondurant had some time ago wrought the impression of being widely different from her surroundings, and here lay a bond of sympathy for just a girl of Isabel's taste and cultivation. It is almost always true of any woman that the moment she is made to see life with the look of one at odds with the dull and the commonplace, her sensitiveness to comparatively trifling felicities and niceties of manner and costume becomes vigilant and keen. In her own sex, at least, she notes and even treasures effects of attire, of posture, of carriage, of phrase and intonation, which to a man not constantly thrown among his fellows possessed of all these lighter superficial graces, would pass unobserved and uncriticised. Isabel did not at first criticise Mrs. Bondurant; she was too glad for the companionship of somebody who looked and spoke and behaved as if she were familiar with the better human cultivations.

They talked of unnumbered things together, and spent hours in so talking. Their chief point of tangency, so to put it, had been a mutual dislike of their present environment. But dislike was far too mild a term for the feeling entertained

by Mrs. Bondurant. Loathing expressed it much better, and held at the same time a fitting application to the temperament of the lady herself. She was one whose antipathies all struck you as being of necessity loathings, just as her preferences were all loves and adorations.

Isabel had soon wearied of her. She might have been rather sharply interesting, the girl had concluded, if seen in the active exercise of her personality. But here the personality, like an ebullient pin-wheel on a rusty and slow-moving nail, produced only a kind of noxious sputter. Mrs. Bondurant was, at High Bridge, an exile, and a very bitterly discontented one. She did not so much remind Isabel of an extinct volcano as of a volcano whose crater still smoked wrathfully, with a grudge against the forces of terrestrial disturbance in general for not giving it a better eruptive chance. Her fires were still nimble enough, but fate compelled them to smoke and not to flame. As a human being, a member of the same sublu-nar race with herself, she soon began to take very individual outlines for the eyes of her new acquaintance. She stood as the type of a passionate embodied disappointment. She had started, in a worldly sense, feverishly, victoriously, magnificently. She had wanted nothing subtler and sweeter than high place as a woman of fashion, great wealth, decisive caste, unrivalled distinction. All this had come to her, at first, in the copious-



ness and splendor with which fate will sometimes pour such tribute. And then it had all been taken away, with its echoes, like those of some melodious pageantry, to linger in her ears, and its pomps of lost brilliancy and color to haunt her craving sight.

A fair share of her beauty was still left, such as that beauty has always been. Her eyes were like a gypsy's in their metallic darkness; her face, a little lined and faded when now, at her thirty-fourth year, the unpitying sunshine smote it, was of accurate but somewhat angular proportion; her small head poised itself on shoulders whose curves were once of more gracious moulding; her frame, still instinct with soft and fluttering movements, betrayed a spareness which made you remark its height less charitably than of old. But she was still a very engaging, elegant and original figure; one did not need the rural awkwardness of High Bridge to accentuate her physical endowments.

She lived in a house much smaller than the Coggeshal's, and kept but a servant and a half, as she herself averred with more forlornness than pleasantry. "I would like to have my little Bridget a 'buttons,'" she told Isabel, very soon after their acquaintance was formed, in her demure, mirthless and yet almost luridly exaggerated way. "There is something so diabolically common about a female servant, you know, who is under age. I consider that my little Bridget just glares my poverty at

people. But what can I do? If she were a 'button' she couldn't make the beds, or do the upstairs work. Oh, dear! what a ghastly thing poverty is! And *my dear*" (looking at Isabel with tragedy in each of her dark eyes), "how perfectly maddening a thing it *must* be for me, who have had my millions — yes, *millions*!"

Isabel was certainly very much won over, at first. She felt, while Mrs. Bondurant talked to her, as if she were wandering through the melancholy mazes of some ruin, where you met, every now and then, gaudily-blossoming vines in festoons and clusters under the most vivid of blue Italian skies. Mrs. Bondurant dealt in sad memories enough, but they were somehow as cheerfully tinted as the fragments of a shattered vase. As for the present poignancy of her sufferings, Isabel could not by any means allow it. She had herself seen enough actual want in the world not to feel any great throes of pity for this lamentation over lost luxury.

Mrs. Bondurant had quickly become more confidential. "I sometimes feel," she told Isabel, "like a walking corpse." It occurred to her hearer that this was an experience in the way of mere sensation from which she herself had thus far been wholly shut out; and so, while Mrs. Bondurant leaned her slender body forward and peered mournfully into the face of her companion, Isabel failed, during the little ensuing pause, to hazard

the slightest opinion of how a walking corpse might be expected to feel.

"I was a Hudsonbank, you know," the lady continued. "If there ever were two real howling swells," she tenderly and retrospectively added, "they were my mother and father. Mamma had come of a terrifically old Southern family; two or three of her cousins or great-aunts or something like that, had married into the English nobility. Mamma was a perfectly frightful heiress; I forget just how much it was, but I know a great deal of it was in slaves, and papa, you know, who was Northern to the backbone, thought that was simply disgusting and beastly. So in a few years he made her sell them all. Mamma became thoroughly Northern herself, afterward, but she always talked with a funny little twang that some people loathed, but that I used to adore, I was so used to it. Poor dear! she's gone; she's spared the pang of seeing me poked here in this vile hole of a place. They entertained hugely; they were immense favorites in society; if you knew much about what that sort of thing is in New York, you'd have heard of them. And nowadays their dinners and receptions and balls would all be chronicled in the newspapers, so you'd be certain to hear of them. But then — about twenty years ago, when I was a mere girl — persons in society *could* breathe and wink without having their portraits and biographies published by the Daily This or the Weekly

That. We lived down Fifth Avenue, in a big old brick house near Washington Square. Oh, it was so lovely, then! I didn't appreciate it! I didn't realize what my life there truly was. I often feel now like an old Cunard steamer that's doing duty off somewhere among the obscure Mediterranean ports, or perhaps cruising in the Pacific, and that once used to carry loads of nice people, wild to get state-rooms on it, from New York to Liverpool. . . Oh, well, I've had my New-York-and-Liverpool days. Now I'm carrying freight and steerage to Australia — or something of that sort. I dare say this sounds abominably blue. But I *am* abominably blue. Do you know, Miss Coggeshal" (the "Isabel," and "my dear Isabel," came a week or two later), "I'm just crazy with envy of the people who never have had a single blessed thing on this globe to be happy for. They've no souvenirs, no reminiscences, no regrets. I simply bristle with them — yes, I do! Do you know — now don't look too horribly shocked when I tell you — I've *more than once* thought of suicide!"

"Suicide!" repeated Isabel, truly shocked, though a few days afterward this announcement would easily enough have taken its place amid the characteristic hyperbole of Mrs. Bondurant.

"Yes. I once took a neck-ribbon and tied it round my throat, and then pulled both ends of it till it was just as *tight*! But I stopped when the strangled feeling came. It's all very well to *be*

dead, but then there's the *dying*, you know. And besides, I do think that if there's one thing more outrageously vulgar than another for a woman to do, it's to kill herself. Men . . . well, men, don't you know, can shoot themselves, or hang themselves, and though everybody agrees it's perfectly dreadful of them, still, they're *men*. But so much more is expected of a woman, somehow, in the way of common decency. Don't you see what I mean?"

Isabel did not feel that she had by any means a lucid perception of what Mrs. Bondurant meant. But she said, a little demurely, though not, as she hoped, quite unsympathetically: "I half understand you, perhaps, though only half. Still, I am almost sure that you could not justly find yourself warranted to take extreme measures like those." This seemed to her very set and formal, for she wanted to show the genuine commiseration awakened in her; she had not yet learned to see the real difference between Mrs. Bondurant and her concomitant nimbus of theatrical red-fire.

"Oh, dear," exclaimed her companion, "how sweetly literal and innocent you are! Of course I never meant to *choke* myself with the neck-ribbon, or anything else. . . . As I was saying, I had a most heavenly life when a girl. I was the only child, Alma Hudsonbank. We went abroad almost every summer, mamma and papa and I. They worshipped me, and I idolized them. Mam-

ma was a beauty; I never looked a bit like her; I'm dark, like papa. She had red-gold hair, and a skin like cream, and the eyes of a dove. One summer, at Baden, when I was only about fourteen, she died very suddenly. It was too horrible. Papa and I nearly went mad over it. Several of the crowned heads sent condolences, and all that—she was such an immense favorite with everybody, and such a born great lady. I never could be real *grande dame*; it isn't in me, though I've held myself as high as can be in my day—don't make any mistake. . But I'm galloping on too fast—it's such a pleasure to talk with a girl like you, here in this awful place, where *canaille* swarm so. . . Papa and I came home, of course in the deepest desolation and woe. He never got over his loss, poor papa, though he brought me out in splendid style when I'd turned eighteen, there at the old family mansion down the avenue. I was a great heiress, and I made myself at once a raving, tearing belle" (Isabel mutely wondered, as she listened, what a 'raving, tearing belle' could possibly mean) "and had things for two years or so about as much my own way as any girl in New-York society ever had or ever could have them. You see, I was the fashion. I used to say saucy things to men that they would have been furious at hearing from almost anyone else. But they didn't dare to be furious at me; they knew they couldn't afford to be; I held the fort,



as it were; *qui terre a, guerre a*; I wasn't to be snubbed with safety. Oh, what enchanting times I did have, to be sure! I never went out without four or five bouquets to carry, and four or five admirers, as well, ready to obey my least nod. And offers of marriage! Why, in one week alone I had four — two Englishmen, a Frenchman and an American, and each man of them a *parti*. It wasn't entirely my money; I never could quite make out what it was. Girls who were just as great catches as I was didn't have my powers to attract. And I wasn't pretty, either, except in a bright-eyed, healthful way. Sometimes I think it was animal spirits. Men love animal spirits in a woman; they love a woman who effervesces — who has something about her like the tiny, crisp, hissing sound that champagne makes when it's first poured into a glass. I affected them like that — at least I'm nearly sure I did. A good many people thought me fast, as I was very well aware; but I could afford to be thought so over here, — though not in Europe, of course; and in Europe, for that matter, I always pulled in my horns. I was always as meek as a lamb, when anybody was looking. Among a certain ultra-select little clique I could almost have made it the proper swagger (as the nobs in England say) to cultivate the appearance of being fast. But I never was really fast at all. I was — American. Do you know, I believe we are the only nation in the

world whose women can ever make a noise without being actually vulgar? Oh, mercy me! *I* made noise enough, in all conscience. One good year of my echoes would have rolled up enough sound to last the ordinary respectable English-woman her lifetime."

"And you have dropped into a quieter habit since then?" asked Isabel, with something in her tones that sounded so like stealthy irony as to elicit from her companion a faint, suspicious little start.

"Quieter?" she murmured. "Oh, my marriage had the most marvellous effect on me. All the dash and go died right out of me after it."

With staggered credulity, Isabel here thought: 'What on earth can she then call the qualities that survive?' But aloud the girl said, interestingly enough:

"Ah, yes. Your marriage. I am glad you have come to that. I wanted to hear about it — that is, if you thought best to tell."

"I've been very long in coming to it, haven't I?" said Mrs. Bondurant. "I don't doubt that you think so, my dear. Perhaps I lingered with affection over those pleasanter memories. And my marriage is a perfectly hideous and detestable one."

"Ah, if that be the case," said Isabel, whose incidents of sarcasm were always casual enough beside the nice permanence of her good-breeding,

"perhaps you had better not revive it merely on my account."

"Oh, yes. We are to be friends, I hope — I want enormously, Miss Coggeshal, that we shall be friends — and if we are, it's just as well that I should rend the veil of my inner temple for you — let you see my uttermost shrine, as it were. There would always be a great deal about me that you couldn't account for if I failed to show you what a . . . a fortune's football I've been, kicked up here at last and left to stay! Oh, I declare I feel, sometimes, as if I ought to have great black streaks under each eye, and a kind of livid, blue-mouldy complexion, and snow-white hair, like a woman I saw, once, gambling at Monte Carlo a few hours before she took poison!"

Isabel tried to give a smile that would look polite if not fully appreciative. These occasional bursts of fantasy and extravaganza bewildered her in Mrs. Bondurant; they were like the first experience of what is both sultry and unwholesome in climate to one born amid fresh northern breezes. "I hope you don't take your misfortunes so much to heart as that," she said, feeling how absurdly commonplace her reply rang even while she spoke it.

"Take them to heart, my dear! I lie down with them, dream of them, wake up with them, and go through the day with them. Papa and I first met Eugene Bondurant the last time we were in Paris together. He was an American, a sort of

creole, from New Orleans. He was very handsome, very finished in his manners, and he went everywhere. His mother had been a French lady of the *ancien régime* stock. He was reputed to be enormously rich. There isn't the least doubt of it — he fascinated me intensely almost as soon as we were thrown together. I was then on the verge of an engagement with somebody else — never mind whom; it doesn't matter the least in the world. I soon became so abjectly idiotic about Eugene Bondurant that I believe I'd have eloped with him on the day of my marriage to this 'somebody else,' provided he had asked me to do it. Papa never wanted me to marry him. But I almost laughed in the poor dear old fellow's face when he attempted to dissuade me after I told him Eugene and I were engaged. Everbody seemed to consider it an excellent match. Eugene wasn't known at all in New York (he's known there well enough now!) but his European standing was beyond dispute, and in New Orleans the Bondurants had for generations been great people. . . Well, he crossed back here with us on the same steamer, as my betrothed husband. Two or three months later we were married from the old Fifth Avenue house, in grand state. I wore a pearl necklace that must have cost thousands — a gift from Bondurant himself. The ceremony was in Grace Church, and all New York jostled and elbowed each other to get to it. I liked the *élan* of the

thing; I had eight bridesmaids, and knelt at the altar trailing point-lace costlier than many princesses, or queens, either, over there on the other side, have ever worn at their weddings — or worn at all, for that matter. The whole affair must have been perfectly superb, the church part, the breakfast, the reception, and everything. And there wasn't the slightest touch of vulgarity about it, — no shoddy pretentiousness, you know. Papa understood how to do things *en prince*; he could make his money felt without showing the color of it. Oh, dear! I walked on thrones that day! I loved Bondurant madly. We were going back to Europe very soon, and papa with us. We were going to live in Paris, in a great *hôtel* on the Rue Royale. My whole future was one dream of Elysium. I was *too* happy! I burst out crying like a perfect baby just before we started on our wedding-tour that evening; they had to give me lavender, or something, before they got me into the carriage with Eugene; it looked such horribly bad form, you know, to see a bride go off boohooing. . . Well, we'd scarcely reached Washington, Bondurant and I, when a telegram came to us from New York. My dear, what *do* you think it was?" Here Isabel's companion leaned very close to her, and caught one of her hands. "Papa was dead! Yes! He had dropped dead with an aneurism only a few hours after we left him! That was the first blow. I don't know how I lived

through it. It never had seemed to me as if papa *could* die till after I'd gone myself and didn't need him any more. He'd always been like my second self. If I stretched out my hand, there he was, with his sweet black eyes, and his iron-gray moustache, and his 'Yes, my dear,' and his smile, with its dimple in each cheek. Bondurant brought me back more dead than alive. I raved and shrieked when I saw papa in that awful wooden box, with the glass over his face. They said I wanted to break the glass; they had to hold me by main force. For days they thought I was going mad. But I didn't go mad. I begin to think you never do when it would be better for you if you did. Lunatic-asylums are not half as convenient in that way as convents are; some of those nuns abroad — what secrets *they* hide under their veils! I'd be a nun now if I could only believe in anything *really*, but I never could! . . . Well, I woke up from it all, my dear, adoring Bondurant more than I'd ever done. Old Stuyvesant Hudsonbank was executor of papa's will, and I was executrix. Stuyvesant Hudsonbank was papa's third or fourth cousin. I had always more or less abominated him. He must now be well past seventy, but I don't doubt he'll see a hundred. He's a widower, and he lives in a great gloomy, damp old house in Second Avenue. Poor papa used to say that he was 'solid.' I'm afraid I don't know what 'solid' is. I only know that my relative is very



rich, dresses like a tramp, and lives like a pauper. And I never remember him to be anything different from just that. The moment I heard he had been left executor I looked at my husband with despair. But Bondurant said he'd try to make matters go nicely, and I merely answered, 'for Heaven's sake do!' But very soon I found that matters were not going a bit nicely. Bondurant quarrelled with Stuyvesant Hudsonbank about the management of the estate. My husband wanted to make an immediate sale of all the houses and lots and things in New York, preparatory to our going abroad. I wished to go abroad, and sided with Bondurant; I said 'yes.' But Stuyvesant Hudsonbank said 'no,' and said it, at first very stoutly. Then he grew furious, after we had both opposed him. Everything was left unconditionally to me by poor papa, and besides all that I had mamma's fortune. I was immensely rich; I must have been worth about three millions. But I said to my husband, like the blind, doting goose that I was (and I was always the *worst* goose about money-matters!) — 'Now, Eugene, do you just manage everything your own way, and if that old creature goes on making too much of a fuss, we'll have to see what the Law will do to stop him!' But he soon left us, in high dudgeon; he washed his dingy old Knickerbocker hands of us — how I wish, now, that he hadn't! . . . My husband sold real-estate right and left; he turned everything into cash. I owned all

the cash, but I never dreamed of doing anything except say "very well," and sign my name to papers whenever he brought them for me to sign.

. . . After everything had been settled we went abroad. I knew no more of my own affairs than a child of three. I left everything to Bondurant. I'd given him . . . what is it? . . . power of attorney, after a while, and all that sort of thing. Oh, how I trusted him! Why shouldn't I have trusted him? I adored him; I thought the sun rose and set in him! . . . Well, on the continent, after our time of wearing black had expired, we lived in glorious style. We took a superb house in Paris, right on the *Champs Élysées*. I always had four footmen to show me from my door-step to my carriage. When we were not going to balls and dinners we were giving them. I was always very loyal to my own people; I kept on good terms with the American colony, as they call it in Paris. Whenever I heard a spiteful, jealous remark about myself from any of them I invited the backbiter to dinner. You can smooth over so much, in that way, with money. I wanted to lead — and I led. But I won over the foreign swells too. I had Germans, Austrians, Russians and English at my *salons* who thought twice before they went anywhere, *I* can tell you! And even some of the *Faubourg St. Germain* people came, too. I recollect one dinner of ours where I went in with an arch-duke and Bondurant went in with a cousin

of the Czar — such a fright as she was, by the way, with rubies as big as pigeon-eggs and a squint that might have stopped a clock! . . . Of course my husband and I drifted apart. But I still thought worlds of him. I flirted with lots of the swells over there, but I was always as *careful*! And I still kept on trusting him as we trust the very sun in heaven. All this lasted for a number of years. I knew we were spending heaps of money, but I knew there were heaps of it for us to spend. I never fancied our money could give out, and it never would have given out but for one miserable, hateful reason. And that reason was the last that could possibly enter my thoughts. Nobody told me about it. If I'd been bad, if I'd had a lover, like lots of the women who used to kiss me and fondle me and make much over me, I might have learned it in time. But not a whisper of the real truth ever reached me. I suppose nobody actually knew *how* matters stood. When you live as we lived, your wealth is always thought ten times what it is. I knew that Bondurant liked cards, and that he often bet heavily at the races. But I hadn't the ghost of a suspicion that he'd been ploughing into my principal for years after gambling away all his own. Well, he had, and one day the whole horrifying truth burst on me. Everything was gone. Gambling had been a mania with him all this time. We were head-over-ears in debt. And I, who had believed every dollar of my own

fortune as safely invested as when papa left it to me, found, one morning, that I owed thousands and thousands of francs I couldn't pay. And Bondurant? He told me this agonizing fact as coolly as if he'd dropped into my boudoir to let me know he was going to Vienna or Monaco for a short trip. Oh, the *scandale publique* of it all, the disgrace, the mortification! All my grandeur fell rattling round my ears like a house of cards. And to make it worse, Bondurant had done something on the *Bourse* for which they put him into prison. There was even some talk of the *Galères* when his trial came off. Friends deserted me in shoals. A few people stuck to me—a very few—and just those whom I would never have believed it of. Human nature turns out so queerly at times like these. Some people cling to you from vanity and a certain kind of snobbishness. It's funny to think of, but I'm right; they don't like to have it said of them that they deserted you. Others cling because they want to be in at the death, as it were, and settle old grudges by a farewell stab—yes, it's really true! But others, thank God—pardon my profanity, my dear—won't give you up because they've got hearts and souls. And these are not many—they're only a handful. That's the way I found it. . Well, I went to see Bondurant ever so many times in prison, and though I cried and carried on fearfully, and swore I'd be faithful to him through thick and

thin, I always came away with a kind of chill. I began to understand that he'd never cared for me a bit — that I'd been *used* — that all his love had been a sham — that in so many words he had all along acted a selfish, wily, hypocritical part. The case against him was horribly strong; he had forged somebody's signature for a great amount. He had played his long, infamous game, had lost at it, and then had tried to right himself as only a villain will. And now — now that I haven't a grain of love or respect remaining for him, I can't help being glad that he got someone to smuggle a pistol into his cell and blew out his brains with it, a week before his time of trial. The news may have taken ten years or so off my life; I don't doubt that it did. I was ill — delirious, and at death's door — for three months, more or less. When I was well enough to go, some friends who themselves happened to be going, took me back here. And here I've been ever since. I haven't a dime except what old Stuyvesant Hudsonbank gives me. And he's given it with a growl — almost a curse. I never see him; it's all done through his lawyer. I don't know if he's left me one dollar, and he may die to-morrow. I've tried several suburban places like this — Staten Island, and Communipaw, and South Orange, and two or three others. But I think I hate this the least, somehow. I can look out on the big, beautiful Bridge from my side-windows, and almost persuade

myself that I'm abroad again. And then the whole valley has that suggestion for me; I can't explain why; it's the way the land lies — the way the foliage is massed on the slopes — the way the light seems to strike and the distance to spread. It reminds me of views I've seen in France; it has what you'd call 'style' in a landscape of Daubigny's or Dupré's. But oh, dear! there's very little style about the throngs that come up here to enjoy themselves. The illusion stops there. That's why I called the place a hole. I alluded to the company it keeps."

This woful history of Mrs. Bondurant's past dwelt in Isabel's memory for many succeeding days. She could not rid herself of the thoughts it had roused. She was soon enough convinced that all these misfortunes had befallen a weak woman and a flippant one; but might not very much the same destiny have overtaken some stronger and higher-minded woman as well? The sad side of life had hidden few of its grimmer shadows from her meditative observance here amid hours of inevitable solitude. She was a girl for whom to be much alone was to think deeply, and of necessity her mind had brooded, though with far more sorrow than morbidness, upon the gloom wrapping all human destiny. Isabel's was not a nature to be morbid for any long period; her sympathies toward those of her kind beset by griefs and failures laid a forbidding spell upon



anything like the mere sombre luxury of pessimism. She could never reflect at all steadily upon how grievous a world it is when everything has been said for and against its unhappiness, without some sort of brisk, vapor-dispelling impulse to take her individual share in the task of lightening burdens and binding up wounds. Her humane desires were large in the abstract, though practically limited by circumstance. But she tried to do what she could, and felt glad in spirit when sure that whatever rushlight of cheer she could lift had sent a ray of true help somewhere. Many of the poor and sick at High Bridge knew her face, her voice, and not seldom the gentle touch of her hand, and though the latter had no silken purse-strings to unloosen, its ministrations were often a very sweet challenge to gratitude. Her mother, her father and Sadie were aware of these good offices, though their details, often discharged in so quiet a manner that scarcely a record of them transpired, were merged in one rather vague acceptance. It was always taken for granted by the household that Isabel had some little out-of-door charity in course of exercise. It was a part of the personality of Isabel to be thus interesting herself, and it took a familiar place in their general recognition of her, just as did her inability to ever become an astute shopper, or her distinctive untrustworthiness in the matter of neat needle-work.

For the reason that she longed to give aid when any need of it appealed to her through a fellow-creature, the recent alteration in her father, betokening some secret trouble, had cost her many silent pangs. And for some time after her first meeting with Mrs. Bondurant, she had felt much the same kind of regret. But by degrees this had vanished. Mrs. Bondurant, in her way, "rang" as "false" as the sportive Carolan had done. The sensational and hectic widow had two severe faults: she was deceitful and she was selfish. Of course her fate had been a hard one, but could not much of her disaster be laid at the door of her own shallowness and insincerity? Isabel, noting little acts and speeches as she began to know the lady better, fell to asking herself what hard things might not that lover whom she had mercilessly jilted in Paris for the courted and brilliant Bondurant be able to assert against her. Then, too, those years of pomp and prestige; — was her lord more to blame than she for their hollowness, their idle glare? What influence of example might not her own curbed folly have wrought in him? And how exacting or how yielding had the father whom she liked to remember as having so passionately loved, found the affection which she claimed to have lavished with such bounteous tribute?

‘It is almost plain to me,’ soon decided Isabel, ‘that she recognized no error in her past course.’

And this was indeed true. Mrs. Bondurant had long ago put herself on the list of those whom fate has wantonly maimed, and she was now so exclusively absorbed in contemplating the extent of her own injuries that the question of having herself ever dealt any had perhaps not even faintly dawned upon her consciousness. She was like a person with some extraordinary kind of suit against accident, chance, the powers of the air, who hugged his grievance fiercely and awaited future justice with shivers of suspense. But any conception of self-blame, either in retrospect or anticipation, seemed totally unformed by her intelligence.

Isabel found it hard to resist all her blandishments and overtures. And after a while the girl gave up seeking to resist a good part of them. Though there had begun to be tedium in Mrs. Bondurant, there was also diversion, and when it became a question of varying her high-strung, flamboyant monotonies with poor Mrs. Mulligan's rheumatic groans or Mrs. Cumnisky's bewailed slenderness of substance, the change was not free from positive refreshment for Isabel.

She had invited Mrs. Bondurant to lunch one day, and the result had been markedly unsuccessful. Mrs. Coggeshal, who was always the soul of civility and hospitality to any actual guest, stiffened visibly before the florid and whimsical deportment of this one. Her only immediate comment,

after the guest's departure, "My, Belle, she's rather free-and-easy for a *lady*!" and Isabel understood that her mother's further critical reserve hid depths of uncomplimentary prejudice. But Sadie was much more outspoken. "I don't see what you call manners, Belle, if you like hers," announced Sadie, with the usual loiter of speech, and a sidelong look at her sister that went with a shocked backward movement of the head. "Dear! She took her asparagus up in her fingers, for one thing!"

"There's nothing ill-bred about that," said Isabel, with neutral good-humor. "I should do it, too, if I liked the vegetable and ate it. Papa always does it, you may have observed."

"He wouldn't in company," resisted Sadie; "you know it, Belle."

"No, I don't. There's ample polite authority for it, I assure you. "More," she added, with her eyes taking a mild twinkle, "than for calling it 'asparagus,' as you *will* do, and with a quiet elegance, Sadie, that makes me almost doubt the dictionary."

"Pshaw," said Sadie; "I'd rather pronounce it a little wrong than eat it like that. But there were other things," she went on, with the solemnity of conviction. "I caught her in two stories. One was about not knowing what to buy for her meals at home, and leaving everything to her cook. Why, Belle, I saw her having groceries put into

the back of that funny little wagon of hers, just here in the village, only a few days ago. And then that hat of hers,— she said she bought it in New York, and there's one almost precisely like it, except for the bunch of pansies, in Miss Pink's little milliner-store."

"Perhaps she confused the pansies with the bonnet," said Isabel, lightly at first and then growing serious. "But I don't endorse her strict veracity, Sadie. And I see she hasn't made a very handsome impression upon either you or mamma." Here Isabel looked at her mother, and continued, with a fond little touch of banter, "Poor mamma! she's showing wonderful self-control. She doesn't want to express *her* full abhorrence through feelings of delicacy for myself as Mrs. Bondurant's introducer."

"Oh, there you are, Belle!" exclaimed Mrs. Coggeshal. "I haven't any *such* feelings—of course not. I dare say a good deal of what I didn't like in her is on account of her living so much abroad. But I'm glad for you to have any new acquaintance, dear, and I guess she must be one you'll enjoy talking with. She *is* bright—oh, bright as she can be. I noticed the way she answered your father, once or twice. You and he could get on with her, I guess, better than Sadie and I could. She's got *brains*. You just ask your father if he doesn't think so."

"I'm afraid he does not," said Isabel. "I fan-

cied she bored papa terribly during lunch. You saw how he got away from her as soon as he conveniently could."

Mrs. Coggeshal sighed, and nodded assentingly as she did so. "My!" she lamented; "it appears to me he's always getting away from everybody, nowadays, — even his own family."

Isabel did not again ask Mrs. Bondurant to lunch. But they exchanged occasional visits, and now and then drove together in the little clattering one-horsed vehicle. When the invitation had at length come for her to drop in on a certain evening and meet the newly-arrived stranger of High Bridge, Mr. Lloyd Brockholst, Isabel had surprisedly answered:

"Do you know him, then? You didn't tell me that you did when we spoke of him a day or two ago."

"I wasn't quite sure, so I said nothing," answered Mrs. Bondurant. "But since then I've met him, face to face, near his uncle's house. I remembered him at once — and so did he remember me. We used to know each other in Paris. We had a little chat, there on the road. He said he would drop in to-night. You'll come too, won't you?"

"Thanks, yes," said Isabel. She was wondering if she had now heard the precise truth from her companion. She had grown to be rather keen, in a detective way, regarding Mrs. Bondurant's prevarications and quibbles.



But Mrs. Bondurant had no suspicion that Isabel suspected her. Doubtless she would not have greatly cared had she known this to be the case. Her motive in asking Isabel to appear that evening was not at all a complex one. Brockholst had agreed to pay her a visit, and a very natural feeling of awkwardness had ensued upon his acquiescence. She had not been under the same roof with him in a long time. Not since she had told him, one day in Paris, when he was her accepted lover, that she had decided to throw him over and marry Eugene Bondurant.

## VI.

ISABEL was the first to arrive, that evening, of Mrs. Bondurant's two expected guests. But very soon afterward Mr. Lloyd Brockholst appeared within the small sitting-room on the ground-floor, where a lamp, shaded by an immense paper sunflower shed its light upon a few happy little effects of decoration, considerably more modish than costly.

He came into the room with a handkerchief crushed in one hand, as if he had paused for a minute on the little piazza to sweep its folds across a moistened face. But he did not look at all warm. It occurred to Isabel that he was not one whom the extremes either of warmth or cold affected gallingly. He seemed, however, to express a repose acquired rather than inherent — or at least this idea now came fancifully into Isabel's head as her gaze dwelt upon his tallish figure and his blond, calm, equable face. Brockholst's looked somehow like the tranquillity that is an emotional development, not an original property; it might have resembled those pools into which certain rivers widen placidly after more turbulent beginnings among rapids and cataracts — or that mellower adjust-

ment of air and sun which follows the first thunder-heats bred by rash young summer. Even before there had commenced to be anything at all like conversation, Isabel had noticed two points in Brockholst which came out on a nearer view. Perhaps they did not come out to everybody, however, as quickly as to herself—provided they were even observed at all. His hazel eyes, which had both the shine and tint of an autumn oak-leaf when wet and flooded with sun, showed, through some peculiar moulding of lid or pupil, for much smaller than a close view determined them. Then, to the corners of his mouth when he smiled (which was by no means an occasion of ascetic rarity) a little effect of gloom or fatigue would seem to drift, so that the young and keen pair of eyes which now watched him smile for the first time had an unsatisfied longing to diminish distance and find out whether they were two tiny wrinkles or no that struck this minute note of sadness amid his good-humor.

“Here we are, talking of the weather,” Mrs. Bondurant exclaimed, some fifteen minutes or so after the entrance of Brockholst, “just as I was sure we would be. What a detestable nuisance it is! How it insinuates itself into everybody’s affairs!” She spoke much more collectedly than she had done thus far; at first something had seemed to make her flighty and insecure both in action and speech.

"The weather?" said Brockholst. He had addressed himself to Isabel ever since they were introduced, though his eyes took a sidelong glance now and then toward Mrs. Bondurant, and it had chanced nearly always to be that lady and not Isabel whose words he was in the act of acknowledging. Isabel had been rather surprised by this course in him, and did not know if she had better account for it through some lurking vibration from a past discord or in the easier and more flattering way of a swift attraction wrought by herself. The last explanation she was indeed loth to give, since it involved a dread lest he might have learned of what she had archly and gayly said to their hostess regarding how old Mr. Chadwick's unexpected kinsman had pleasurably prepossessed her.

"I have always felt the deepest respect," continued Brockholst, "for the weather as an agent of social intercourse. I don't know what we should do without it. I think we fail to realize its true power as a promoter of civilization. If it were always the same, like many of the persons who make use of it as an infallible 'topic,' dreadful chasms of awkwardness in conversation might present themselves which are now at least creditably bridged over."

Isabel laughed. This struck her as fresh and entertaining. She liked, too, the unconsciously droll way in which it was delivered.

"The next time that it pours in torrents and

keeps me in-doors when I'm very anxious to fare abroad," she said, "I shall try and reconcile myself with the hardship on grounds of philanthropy."

Brockholst smiled. He had never cared much for mere beauty in women without some sort of mental grace behind the fleshly one. He had already taken note of Isabel's comely exterior, and asked his own thought if much immaterial attraction accompanied it.

"I've long had the idea," he said, "of writing an essay on the weather. But I've never gone further than my title. I should call the essay 'It,' and begin by reminding an ungrateful world how indebted we have been for generations to the simple yet expensive privilege of being able to say 'it rains,' 'it snows,' 'it is fine,' or 'it is cloudy.'"

Isabel leaned forward, with a soft, spontaneous clasping together of her hands. "Oh, by all means write your essay," she exclaimed, "and the funnier you are, the more you will awaken our dormant gratitude!"

"Be careful," warned Mrs. Bondurant to Brockholst. "Miss Coggeshal may turn traitor, and give the subject to her father, who is an enormously clever author, as you're no doubt aware."

"I have heard that this was the case," said Brockholst, with a civil little nod toward Isabel.

"Oh, you shouldn't merely have heard it," said Mrs. Bondurant. "You should have read 'Rachel Rand,' Mr. Coggeshal's last novel."

"No doubt," he replied suavely. "But I must plead guilty to having read very few novels of late — except foreign ones."

"Do you mean English ones?" asked Isabel, bristling a little.

"No. French — when I have read that kind of literature at all."

"Ah, the French are great artists in fiction," said Isabel, promptly mollified, as we all feel by the discovery of a taste with which our own is quite in accord. "I only wish their choice of subject was more often as satisfactory as their treatment of it."

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Bondurant. "They do harp on one theme, don't they? How revolting and sickening it gets to be!"

"A good deal of it has only one excuse," said Brockholst. "The marvellously flexible and variegated language in which it is written."

"Well . . . fine feathers don't make fine birds," morally declared Mrs. Bondurant, whose principal reading was French fiction.

"Your father is a hard worker, is he not?" said Brockholst to Isabel.

"He has been," she answered, "but of late his energy seems to have deserted him."

"It's this fiendish weather," said Mrs. Bondurant, who had lifted a silver-handled fan of pink ostrich plumes, which was very likely a rich little souvenir of faded splendors, between herself and



the light, while she leaned indolently back in her rocking-chair of wicker-work. "It's enough to weaken an ox."

"Papa's old industry had begun to fail him before the hot weather set in," said Isabel ruminatively.

"But I hear he has *been* very industrious in his life," said Brockholst, — "that he has written seven novels before this last very successful one."

"Oh, so you've been discussing him with somebody, have you?" laughed Isabel. She felt a thrill of sweet filial pride as the sentence escaped her. It was pleasant for her to find that he had taken enough interest in her father's concerns, without personally knowing him, and after being only this brief time at High Bridge, to recollect the precise number of books he had written. In this age of many books, when it would almost seem as if more people wrote than read, there was difficulty enough where one tried to correctly account for any literary progeny whatever, apart from being able to state the precise extent of it. But Isabel's flush of gratification underwent a chill as she heard Brockholst's next words.

"That man of my uncle's told me — the dapper, curly-haired sort of chap, who looks like a mixture of a clergyman and an actor. Carolan, I mean."

"I really think he's superbly handsome, don't you know?" said Mrs. Bondurant. "I've only

recently found out what he was — a kind of servant to Mr. Chadwick, isn't he? But I never thought he looked like a gentleman. He makes one want to stare at him but not to have him presented. He has a second-rate, *déclassé* air."

"He thinks himself a good deal of a gentleman, I can assure you," said Brockholst, with a tinge of satire.

"What an odd world it would be," laughed Mrs. Bondurant, "if everybody in it were treated just according to the estimate he puts on himself!"

"I don't believe such a state of affairs would increase the oddity of it," said Brockholst dryly. "It often seems to me, just as it stands, a world in which everybody either gets considerably better treatment than he deserves or considerably worse. But generally better," he added, after the least appreciable pause; and his glance had by this time fallen upon Mrs. Bondurant's fan-shaded face.

"Miss Coggeshal can tell you all about Carolan," said the latter, perhaps with an aim to avert further suggestive epigram on the part of one who stood in the position to blend it with subtle yet biting reproach. "Her papa has been kind enough to treat him with monstrous politeness."

"Is there much to tell about him?" asked Brockholst of Isabel.

"My father could answer that question more fully than I can," replied Isabel.

"I hope you like him," said Brockholst. "It would be a pity if you did not."

"How, a pity?" queried the girl, surprisedly.

"He likes you so much," was the reply of Brockholst. "You are very high up, I should judge, among his enthusiasms."

Isabel felt herself color. "He has a great many of those, I fear," she said, a little flurriedly.

"All the more magnificently complimentary," exclaimed Mrs. Bondurant, "if you're high on the list, Isabel. . Come," she went on merrily to Brockholst. "What did he say about her? If he called her very handsome you mustn't dare to breathe it, however, for Miss Coggeshal is hugely above all grovelling trivialities like that, as you'll find if you ever know her better."

"Knowing her better is a contingency that should reconcile me to almost any discovery," said Brockholst, with his easy, polished yet slightly matter-of-fact air. "I've a good mind to risk informing Miss Coggeshal that Carolan did prepare me for more than one agreeable surprise."

"There!" cried Mrs. Bondurant, dropping her fan and clapping her hands together. "You won't be a woman, Isabel, if you don't like Carolan forever afterward!"

"But I have never said that I didn't like him," protested Isabel, with confusion. She was meanwhile quite woman enough, in one sense, to have been won by the smoothly perfect deference of

Brockholst, where quietude, if indeed not hiding sincerity, so resembled it that all difference defied scrutiny.

“What judgment could be more cruel than such a negative one?” said Brockholst, with a smile that had passed almost before his final word was framed. “But seriously,” he continued, doubtless because he had noted that Isabel rocked a little, for some reason, in the troublous waters of embarrassment, “I should say that this Carolan was an indolent, brilliant and rather superficial fellow, of the kind I’ve seen droves of in my day. I should predict of him, on my short acquaintance, that he was a person with much of the left-handed self-esteem earnest people are apt to call vanity, but without the finer shrewdness to detect that earnest people are not deceived by it.”

Isabel nodded to the speaker, with sparkling eyes. “I believe you are very near the truth in that opinion,” she said.

“And Isabel is one of the earnest people,” struck in Mrs. Bondurant. “Now I dare say this Carolan would fascinate poor frivolous me, if he were only a trifle less of the Bohemian in his style. But even those adorable little blond curls that peep out of his hat can’t make me pardon him for wearing it cocked on one side like a rakish carpenter or plumber with an eye for the pretty nurses and the chambermaids on a holiday. I am convinced that he wears false cuffs on his shirts,

and I have a suspicion that he is n't incapable of a paper collar. And I somehow feel rigidly confident, as well, that he is fond of dropping into the Atalanta Casino or some of those other haunts which beautify our neighborhood, and drinking beer with any Tom, Dick or Harry he may hit upon. Well; perhaps I'm wrong, there. He might go as far as Tom or Dick, and draw a line at Harry. Oh, dear! I wonder why it is that I loathe Bohemians so. I suppose it's because I've had such a narrow escape from becoming one myself. So much ruined grandeur tumbles into Bohemianism. It's a yawning abyss that I've thus far been mercifully saved from."

The talk soon drifted to subjects more welcome, so far as concerned Isabel, than either the faults or excellences of Carolan. She started with surprise on learning that it was ten o'clock, and that the maid-servant whom she had bidden to call for her at that hour, now waited outside. "Send her away, Miss Coggeshal," proposed Brockholst, quite persuasively, "and allow me to unlatch your gate for you a little later."

"Oh, thanks," faltered Isabel, who wanted decidedly to remain longer. She looked at Mrs. Boudurant, and somehow the cold gleam of that lady's smile confirmed a dread which had been gaining strength within her for the past half-hour. "But I fear it will not be possible, this evening," she added, glad that she could qualify her thanks

for his offer by a little union of civility and likelihood. "During this fatiguing weather they put out the lights and close the house at a rather early hour."

"Then may I go to the gate with you just the same?" Brockholst asked, rising as she rose.

Mrs. Boudurant also quitted her easy-chair at this moment, and any eye fixed closely on her face could have seen there the shadow of a chagrin controlled yet evident. This had indeed been for her an evening of dismay and mortification.

"My dear Brockholst," she said, while this form of speech struck Isabel as an unpardonable laxity and familiarity, "you forget that I've myriads of things to ask you yet about Paris and the people I left there—mutual friends as well as mutual enemies. No doubt they've all forgotten me as utterly as if I'd been in my grave a century. But when you're buried alive like myself, being forgotten and forgetting are two vastly opposite matters."

Brockholst had already moved toward the door at Isabel's side; but Mrs. Bondurant, softly pressing forward as well, now solely addressed Isabel, while she put both arms about the girl's neck and kissed her for good-night:

"My dear, if you must desert me yourself, don't let *him* desert me also—though I abominate to have *you* go so early, of course."

"He must not go on my account," said Isabel,



with a pretty, imperious little nod to Brockholst, though she spoke in the third person.

"I won't go on your account," he responded, securely. "I'll merely see you home."

"Stay for a little while," said Mrs. Bondurant to him, lowering her voice perceptibly but speaking with a direct unveiled appeal.

He seemed in doubt what to answer, for an instant, as he turned, meeting her uplifted eyes. But almost immediately afterward he said, quite in a careless way: "I'll stroll back presently."

"Oh, very well." As Mrs. Bondurant spoke the sentence she covertly bit her lip. Brockholst went out at Isabel's side. But their hostess did not follow them into the hall: she remained there in the lamplit sitting-room. She soon heard their voices, as they spoke together while descending the steps of the porch. When the voices died away she threw herself into her easy-chair once more. She was bitterly annoyed. A reluctance to meet Brockholst alone after all these years, during which he must have seen both her rise and her downfall, had caused her to make Isabel a second guest at her house this evening. But she had meant to use Isabel as the merest convenience. It had never occurred to her that the girl might win more than the most ordinary heed from so worldly-wise a man as this cast-off lover of ages ago. She had always thought Isabel handsome, but the girl had seemed, in her judgment,

to lack so much that her own worldly wisdom held as the proper attraction for any one who was outside of a simpler, unsophisticated radius, and to be so entirely unpossessed of all really fascinating arts! It was wonderful that even with her nice eyes and her winningly candid demeanor, she should have made anything like an impression upon so tried a veteran as Lloyd Brockholst. But she appeared to have undoubtedly done so. 'How absurd of me to feel jealous of him!' now entered her thoughts, while she slowly rocked herself in the big wicker chair.

And yet jealousy was acutely at work in her as she awaited Brockholst's promised return. Now that her life stretched before her in one barren level of failure, she was eager for even an illusory hope of changing the desolate prospect. On first meeting Brockholst the past had risen to her with a poignant vividness. What a mockery of fate it had seemed, to meet here in her ignominious exile this man so closely allied with all that glowing girlish past! It amazed her afterward that she could have been so self-possessed in stopping her shaggy little pony and holding converse with him as she had done, there on the bright-lit main-road of High Bridge. Of all men on this densely-populated planet, he should have been the last to meet her thus, amid her surroundings of defeat, dependence and self-disgust. If she had married *him*, how differently everything might have turned

out! And he had loved her with passion, with loyalty, in those other days. But might not some residuum of his old love still remain? Treacherous and faithless as she had been to him, might he not hide an imperishable force of attachment which she could yet have it in her power to revivify? He was rich, and she was free to marry again. The detested allegiance to Stuyvesant Hudsonbank, the out-of-town weariness, the poverty, — so keenly poverty to one who had drunk of extravagance and luxury, — the biting and irksome dread of future penury, the hate of feeding upon memories whose sweetness was now as vinegar, — all this might be appeased and alleviated if only she could win back the man once carelessly thrust aside. And why should she not thus win him back? She was miserable, and her misery must carry its due pathos to him. She was unfriended, and her friendlessness must provoke his instincts of protection. She had erred, and her repentance (it was all promptly clear just how she would manage the lights and shadows of this repentance!) must rouse his impulses of pardon. She had never really loved him in the former time, and she had wildly loved Bondurant, who had pushed him away from even her most casual regard. But what was love to her now — this impetuous love that women of her age had nearly always outlived, no matter how serene had been their matrimonial fates? On the other hand, re-

habilitation was now much to her, and place in the world where she had lost all place, and notice, respect, recognition from those who had ceased to remember whether she deserved either that or oblivion!

‘I am not so faded that he could not care for me now in recollection of the way he used to care for me once,’ she told herself, while she sat waiting his return and thinking over how she would act when he came. ‘If I’ve lost vitality, so must he have lost it. If it’s an Indian summer with me so must it be with him. He has been living all this time, just as I have been. I know very well that women grow old far faster than men do. With us it’s the loss of youth; with them it’s the loss of inclination. But if we have the little wrinkles under the eyes, so have they the little wrinkles — the *rides du cœur* — that nobody sees except themselves.’

She fell to wondering and fretting about Isabel, while she rocked herself, and now and then fanned herself with the pink ostrich fan, dimly suggestive of her vanished glories. It had seemed so like fate that Brockholst should have turned up in this lonely out-of-the-way quarter! It looked so much as if he might be her deliverance from bondage. His forgiveness was now so poetically in order. It would be almost like the end of a turbulent but well-arranged romance. Isabel rather interfered with its harmonious termination,

however. There should have been no Isabel whom he accompanied home, and was apparently glad to accompany home. But why should he have made that little agreement about coming back? Might it not have risen from a natural reluctance to show his full leniency and clemency all at once? He had said that he would come back; he would keep his word. She revived certain reminiscences of him, and decided that he had always kept his word in minor questions like this just as carefully as in greater ones. And the effort of memory, even for such a nature as her own, could not be without its reproachful stab. How she had once broken her word to *him*!

She continued to rock herself and to fan herself slowly, and waited for him to return.

## VII.

BROCKHOLST'S offer to accompany her home, had pleased while it embarrassed its recipient. On meeting Mary, the stolid-looking chambermaid of her modest household, Isabel had said a few low words which conveyed dismissal and yet left her in doubt as to just how Mary was to be conveniently spirited off. If Mr. Brockholst went with her as far as her own door, it was not surely permissible that Mary should do anything else except melt into felicitous obscurity. There was a great deal of obscurity, but there was also a great deal of Mary. Knowing that her duenna was not of the most intelligent turn, Isabel had found herself dreading, for some little time after she and her companion had quitted Mrs. Bondurant's cottage, lest a stalwart feminine form might loom at any moment beside them, in tranquil unconsciousness of being neither desired nor needed. But Mary, as it proved, revealed the true intuitions of her sex. She permitted the starlight to screen her return rather than betray it, and Isabel soon found herself taking the firm arm which Brockholst proffered, in mental security as to her servant's possible intrusion.



By the time that she had slipped her hand inside his arm he had begun to talk speculatively and smoothly of life here at High Bridge and of its possible dullness.

"Yes," Isabel found herself answering, presently; "it is dull, and yet perhaps not so very dull to me, because I haven't ever known any thing very much gayer."

"Indeed?" he said.

"No. While abroad with papa I was either travelling or else at school."

"I suppose your father's recent hit with his novel has been a great delight to you?"

"'Rachel Rand?' Well, I should have cared more for it if I had thought papa himself cared more."

"And does he not care much?"

"He seems to think his other novels — or at least some of them — have a stronger claim to distinction."

"I don't doubt it for a moment," said Brockholst. "If they are better, they are of course less popular. It is always the case. Popularity in a book always presupposes inferiority of one sort or another. I have found certain good critics who cry down this view as *dilettante*; but I've repeatedly caught them afterward, in their *feuilletons* there in Paris, arguing for the judgment of the cultivated few. I've had the pleasure, as well, of taxing them with their inconsistency."

"Critics are very apt to be inconsistent, I should say," answered Isabel, "when they are not regrettably ignorant."

"Your father has suffered from their attacks, then?"

"Oh, not much. Papa puts value on a kind of fame—if he really puts value on fame at all—which these random writers of the period can neither give him nor take away from him."

"That is the right way to feel," said Brockholst. "For myself, I don't see the slightest use in having these so-called critics. Do you?" He smiled as he peered down into her face, which he just saw in the accommodating starlight. And he did not lose the bewildered little frown with which she replied to him.

"They're very outrageous, sometimes. They've assailed papa now and then with great hostility. But I've always looked on them as necessary evils. I've never formed any idea as to how we could do without them."

Brockholst laughed. "I have," he said. "It's a very simple idea. Not long ago I wrote a little satirical thing in Paris. It was poor enough French verse, no doubt, but I chose to publish it. I didn't allow a single newspaper to receive a copy of it gratuitously. But it sold very well, all the same. It was advertised, and people found it out that way. I think that is the only fair way for an author. I don't believe in letting one's

publisher distribute copies of one's work among a lot of nobodies, who will very often adorn the book-shelves of their libraries with the very volume they have written easy slanders about. I should always feel perfectly contented to be peppered by a critic who had bought my book and paid for it out of his pocket. But when my publisher sends it to him and he covers it with abuse, I can't help recognizing the rather one-sided conditions of this whole arrangement."

"You yourself are an author, then?" said Isabel, surprisedly.

"No — far from it. But in Paris I knew many authors and many publishers. I tried, once, to make four or five of the best publishers unite in a body to ignore the critics. I wanted them to send the journals no copies of new books whatever. But my plan fell through. There was that feeling about the press being so powerful. I have discovered that newspapers here are still more powerful than in Europe."

"They are very powerful indeed," said Isabel.

"But their literary columns are often meagre and ill-edited," replied Brockholst. "Their political columns are sparkling with ability by contrast, however partisan and insincere. Evidently the men and women who write the book reviews are mere under-paid vendors of opinions. Everybody has opinions, but they wish to sell theirs, and I'm inclined to fancy they sell them at low

rates. Let them be forced to sell something else. Let no new books, as the gifts of publishers, drop into their hands. They will soon realize that as they have failed to write notable books themselves, and that as the position of passing criticism on books written by others who are in many cases their superiors beyond expression has slipped away from them, nothing will remain to them but the adoption of some more amiable means of getting their dinners and breakfasts."

"And do you believe," asked Isabel, "that such a millennium as this will ever arrive for authors?"

"I believe it is very near at hand. The publishers are able to speed its coming if only they will. It's marvellous how long we tolerate an absurdity of injustice before suddenly waking up to it. And what can be a more clear absurdity than that some one individual caprice, animus or even honest judgment should be made to influence the public regarding any new book? Smith, with the *Daily Diatribe* behind him, is a force nowadays in America and England, simply because of his being anonymous — of his being, in fact, the *Daily Diatribe* itself. Resolve him into Smith, pure and simple (or corrupt and complex, if you like) and he becomes a mastiff without teeth. And this is what publishers have the power to do, by turning newspapers into that which any such mere products of haste and transient, impromptu tintype-taking should deservedly be. I

mean commercial mediums of advertisement, and these alone."

"But do you not think that many readers are guided in their choice of books by what they see in the newspapers concerning them?"

"No; it occurs to me that they are usually insensible to such verdicts, and naturally enough. The difference between what Smith writes and what Jones writes is nowadays often the difference between blame and praise, where it has become a question of one and the same book. Newspapers have multiplied largely during the past twenty years here in this country. The Smiths and Joneses have multiplied with them. Criticism, as I now find it, in New York as elsewhere, is a mere wordy war of opposing prejudices."

"And you think it best to exterminate the Smiths and Joneses," answered Isabel, "by depriving them of the gratuitous copies which they now receive as functionaries of the various newspapers?"

"Yes."

"I am afraid the authors themselves would object to that proceeding, even if all the publishers consented to it. I don't mean that my father would," she added, correctively, and with a little perceptible touch of filial pride which made her companion like her none the less for having shown it as frankly and sweetly as she did. "Papa has

no desire, I am sure, to be babbled about either with favor or disfavor. But I should imagine there were many writers who crave publicity even at the price of warm censure, and that these would uphold the system of the Smiths and Joneses, complaining more of silence in the daily prints than they now complain of cruel treatment there."

Brockholst laughed. "Oh, if the authors went against the measure," he said, "there would be no hope of the publishers carrying it through."

"I have always heard," said Isabel, "that most authors are as fond of eulogy as they are impatient of rebuke."

"Well, they have the credit, or discredit, for extreme sensitiveness, but I have seen many of them, and I have also seen many critics. And I have been impelled to conclude that for real hysterical, vigilant, unhealthy sensitiveness, the average critic quite surpasses the average author. The author, in most instances, need but wince under his persecution to make the critic feel offended into redoubling it. If the author is other than a passive victim he rouses new incentives for bad treatment. And as popular opinion stands just now, the critic is ridiculously aided and fortified. The author must never answer his assaults. It is considered bad taste. The author must suffer in silence, and it is ludicrous to state that he does not often suffer. Everybody clearly understands, as well, that he does suffer. The author's



best friends, who counsel him to wrap himself in the majesty of unconcern, know perfectly well that he has precisely the same feeling which a man has who receives, with bound wrists, a hard blow in the face. I don't think it makes any special difference whose hand gives the blow. I confess that a vagabond here in High Bridge might deal me quite as much humiliation and sense of injury by inflicting upon me a blow which I was forbidden to return, as if the same outrage were wrought by some one whom I felt to be my equal."

"Then you believe," said Isabel, "in the author answering his critics?"

"I believe in his being privileged to do so at his inclination, without any foolish charge that he had lost dignity being preferred against him." They had now reached the gate of Isabel's dwelling, and she withdrew her arm from his, standing beside him. "I like fair fights," he added, smiling. "I'm still boy enough for that." He opened the gate, and Isabel passed up to the porch, while he followed. "And I hope also, Miss Coggeshal, that I haven't bored you beyond measure by expressing all these belligerent views." Just as he said this they had reached the steps of the porch. He put out his hand, which Isabel took, immediately answering as she did so :

"No, indeed, Mr. Brockholst. As an author's daughter I am of course doubly interested in

such views. But if you had not told me to the contrary I should have felt sure that you were a full-fledged author yourself."

"No," he said. "That little French satire of which I spoke a moment ago is all that I have ever published."

"But you have written other things?"

He shook his head negatively, and then, with a sudden burst of confession, full of comedy, said, "Well, yes; I plead guilty to having once written a novel."

"A novel?" she inquired, with flattering eagerness.

"Yes. But it never found a publisher. Indeed, it never sought one. I wrote it the last time that I was in this country. I was living with my uncle then, in his town house. I grew disgusted with it after it was finished. Perhaps he has it now in some chest of rubbish. I was thinking over it only yesterday. I should like to fish it out from obscurity, if I could, and have a laugh at it . . . Well, good-night. You won't ask me in, I know; it is too late. But you will let me come and see you, will you not, now that besides being such near neighbors we are actual acquaintances?"

"I shall be most glad to have you come," said Isabel; and while she spoke the words she had a fear lest he should note a tremor of undue excitement in her tones. She liked him so much; he had made her, in her quiet life so untouched by

intercourse with any congenial company of another sex, pleased enough at the possibility of knowing him better.

"I have had friends both in France and England who are authors," he now said, "and I have watched their griefs and heart-burnings with some attention; so that my sympathy, though impersonal, is still ardent."

She looked up into his face with a most earnest glance, while her own face was clearly lighted for him by the reflection from the near doorway.

"Oh, I can understand that so well!" she said. "And I honor you for it. It is so much better to feel for others than to feel simply for ourselves!" She broke into a little embarrassed laugh. "That sounds woefully commonplace; does it not?"

"In the way of active, practical sentiment," he answered, "it is about as far from the commonplace as anything I know. . . And so I may drop in upon you for a chat, even on our brief acquaintance?"

"You certainly may."

"I promise to bore you with no further theories as to the suppression of critics."

"You can't think how thoroughly you've escaped boring me. I am only afraid I shall forget some point in what you have said. For I want, with your permission, to repeat it all to papa."

"I sternly refuse any such permission. I am sure your father knows quite as much regarding

the habits of that species as I can possibly teach him."

"Oh, no ; you've convinced me that he doesn't. But if you should find that neglected novel somewhere among your uncle's papers, read it again, be struck with its excellence, put it into print and receive an ovation of applause for it from the critics, would you not then feel as if their removal from the face of the earth would be a little less of a popular blessing than it had once appeared?"

"Such a change is conceivable," he said, laughing. "But if I laid hands on the manuscript I should almost be afraid to read it. I should give it to the flames with a certainty that its one proper fate was to be pulled to pieces by them alone."

"Oh, that would be really cruel!" exclaimed Isabel, taking him seriously. "If you shrank from a maturer glance at it yourself, why not let some friend read it?"

"Some friend?" he repeated.

"Yes. Mrs. Bondurant, for instance."

He gave a start, so evident that she could not fail to observe and be surprised by it. "Were you under the belief," he said, with emphasis, coming a little closer to her, "that Mrs. Bondurant was my friend?"

"I thought so," she faltered, hardly knowing how to answer him.

"Is she *your* friend?" he asked, low of voice, and yet sharply.

"I—I have not known her long," Isabel almost stammered. "We are on friendly terms."

He seemed about to say something more with the same force of tone he had just used. But she saw him make a rapid little movement with one hand, letting it drop placid afterward at his side. With his walking-stick, which he held in the other hand, he gave a slight, slashing stroke, so that its ferule grated in short, harsh noise on the dark gravel of the path.

"I knew Mrs. Bondurant once," he said, "very well indeed. That was in Paris, some time ago. Since then I have spoken to her but twice,—once here on the roadside, where she reined in her pony to claim my acquaintance, and to-night when you saw us together." He said all this very quietly, but Isabel saw how steadfastly his eyes were fixed upon her in the dimness as he added: "We are not friends, however."

"But you are not enemies?" ventured Isabel.

"I am no one's enemy, I hope," he said, putting out his hand for farewell. "And least of all would I wish to be any woman's. . . Good-night, Miss Coggeshal. I shall hold you to your pleasant promise about letting me visit you" . . .

Brockholst soon went back along the lonely road, under the brooding mellowness of the stars, to Mrs. Bondurant's cottage. He regretted, while he did so, having allowed one suggestive word to leave his lips on the subject of whatever relations

existed between himself and the lady whose dwelling he and Isabel had just quitted. Entire silence would surely have been better, as he realized now. Only that afternoon he had told himself, with a qualm of annoyance, how inconveniently small a sphere was this planet in which he abode. He had not wanted to keep his appointment for that evening; he had even been on the verge of sending an excuse for absence. And yet future meetings would be inevitable; destiny had played one of its most elfin pranks; it would perhaps be nothing but the most ordinary wisdom to accept this wretched coincidence phlegmatically.

‘I hated to think of that girl calling me Alma Bondurant’s friend,’ he now reflected. ‘I had got to feel certain that she herself was never the friend of such a woman. The two Poles are not further apart than those two. One has truth in her eyes and voice; the other—well, I see now why it was that I let even that slender hint slip forth.’

He had great reluctance to anything like private converse with Mrs. Bondurant, and yet he saw that some such interview must occur. She had evidently made up her mind to discuss with him a question which he had once considered burning enough, but which had long ago ceased to give out anything save an occasional sickly memorial flash. And yet this project of tearing a



corpse from its grave with no imaginable motive except to put it back again after remarking the inroads made by decay, had for Brockholst an exasperating needlessness. He saw no shadow of benefit in the whole performance. A good deal of manly indignation had died among the ashes of his perished love; and he was by no means certain that in raking these ashes too recklessly he might not encounter some undelectable sparks there. He did not by any means wish to deal in either reproaches or pardon. The first, as a potential course of action, held no more value for him, now, than if it were the dry and hollow shell of something which had once borne vital breath and movement within; and as to forgiveness of the treachery which had seemed so near shattering his faith in all womanhood, he could best measure his indifference toward that old wrong by the frozen apathy of his present feeling toward its perpetrator.

She was waiting for him in the dim-lighted doorway of her little house as he mounted the steps from the tiny garden below. The lines of her tall figure were well brought out by the softly illumined background, and perhaps there had been distinct premeditation in her posture, put thus effectively *en silhouette*. She had left her rocking-chair some few minutes ago. The air had of late grown damp and cool; our inconstant climate was undergoing one of its abrupt caprices. A cluster

of entangled heliotrope had begun to diffuse its rich and oppressive perfume amid the humid darkness. Brockholst felt the luxurious odor affect him with almost a sense of sickliness as he drew nearer, watching the shape in the doorway. He had never before thought of disliking this odor; he had always loved all the flowers that breathe fragrance — the flowers with souls in them. But just then this pungency, floating out on the night from the hidden purple of the plant, appealed to him as though it were an unwholesome, voluptuous outflow from the nature and actuality of the woman who waited to receive him. Until now he had not realized how keen was the suggestion of tropic indolence and abandonment, of the drowsy lures and spells with which legend has enwrapped evil when it would subtly enchant against conscience, to be found in these unique, delicious blooms. At this moment they seemed to speak in as clear terms of analogy for what life holds of the intoxicating and the wantonly luxurious, as a star that shoots its sharp ray from a winter heaven seems to typify health, energy and chastity.

“I was sure you would come back,” she said to him, as he joined her at the threshold. “Let us go in again.” She had lifted her hand, as if to have it rest in his own, but the dimness may have prevented him from seeing this token of renewed welcome. He followed her into the little sitting-room, where a gentle memory of the departed

Isabel yet pleasantly lingered for him. "What a relief that it has grown so much cooler!" she said, as they re-seated themselves. She had sunk into a chair quite near the one he selected; if this were not accident she rather prettily contrived to make it thus appear; and almost immediately she broke into a laugh so full of some blithe apparent relish that he turned and looked at her with eyes of blank inquiry.

"I—I was thinking of how true were the things you said about the weather a little while ago," she exclaimed, "and of how soon I'm testing its convenience as a refuge from—well, from embarrassment." She looked many shades more serious just at the end of her sentence than she had done at its beginning.

"I did not know you were often embarrassed," said Brockholst, coldly and indifferently, without meeting her eyes. "I thought self-possession was nearly sure to go hand-in-hand with" . . . he paused an instant . . . "experience."

She bit her lip. This had an unpromising sound. She swiftly asked herself if he might not have come back simply to tell her that he would never come back hereafter. Was it not credible that his clemency paused at these limits and these alone?

"I've certainly had experience enough," she said, with tragedy sighing and trembling in her voice. "I don't think you quite realize," she

went on, "the monstrous amount of trouble I have passed through. I don't believe —"

"Yes," he broke in curtly, "I do realize it very well indeed."

"Ah! then perhaps you think it my fitting punishment."

He turned in his chair and looked at her with a very faint smile, where she seemed to see only delicate irony. "Your punishment for what?" he asked mildly.

He puzzled her. She could not be sure if his manner meant complaisance or mockery. "Can't you guess for what?" she said.

"No. My memories of your virtues, you know, put those of your few faults quite in the shade."

The sarcasm stung her, but a good deal less acutely than she chose to pretend that it did. "Oh, how *can* you!" she faltered. "That wasn't like you; if anyone else had said it, all well enough. But *you*! Still, of course I deserve it. I deserve everything you can hurl at me in the way of reproaches."

"I'm not at all good at hurling reproaches," Brockholst said dryly.

"I see. You'd forgiven me, I suppose, because you'd forgotten me. That was how matters lay, was it not?"

"I don't know that I had forgiven you," he answered, half smiling again. "But I didn't cherish any vengeful animosity against you. And yet I'd

by no means forgotten you. How shall I just express to you my quiescent state? No doubt it would interest a psychologist — the arrest of indignation without its decay. I've never yet consulted one on the subject."

"You talk of yourself as if you had a disease for the doctors to look after."

"No — I'm cured."

"You — you suffered, then?"

"Pshaw," he returned, a little scornfully, "why don't you ask whether a knife can cut?"

"It can't," she said, slightly drooping her head, "unless it has a sharp enough blade."

He gave a weariedly irritated motion. "Don't try, Alma, to play the coquette with me at this late hour. There is something — to be quite frank — really ghastly in your doing so." He now looked at her very steadily indeed, with his lips meeting in a firm line, devoid of the least smile.

She sank back in her chair, with a large, fluttered sigh of obvious disappointment.

"I see," she broke forth, almost gasping the words, "you — you hate me."

"I hate no one — I hope."

"You despise me, then."

"I trust that if I did I would be too decent in my breeding to tell you so."

She sprang, with almost a feline movement, from her chair, and faced him. Her frame was quivering with agitation. "I — I thought," she

said, very brokenly, "that you were willing to come back after that girl had left us, in order that we could be alone together and talk over the past rationally and sensibly."

He rose while she was thus speaking. "I don't want to talk over the past," he said, in a voice that was hard and cold. "I didn't come for that."

"Then . . then," she replied, while they both stood peering into one another's faces, "why did you come back to-night at all?"

"To tell you," he said, measuring each word, "that our good-by must be *spoken* to-night. I mean as far as any future visits are concerned." He took a step or two toward the door, but she lifted a hand, detaining him by its faint pressure, set full against his breast. And then, while her hand dropped, as if in mortified afterthought, she cried miserably:

"It's horrible for you to go like this! It's cruel! . . Oh, I know very well that I've no right to speak of cruelty. But a woman has so much less time to be happy in than a man has! A man has almost his whole life. I've flung away *my* life, if you choose, in — in treating you as I did! If I'd married you, Lloyd, all those years ago, we might now be talking so differently together!"

"True enough," he said implacably.

"I was frightfully wrong. I admit that I was. If it were not so ridiculously romantic, I'd throw myself at your feet and implore your



pardon. But I know you'd hate that sort of thing."

"Yes — I would."

"And you're going to leave me without a word, except to say that you will never come here again!"

"Yes. I don't see the use of staying longer on any more polite pretext. Do you?"

"Oh, I see an immense reason for you to stay, just as I see an immense reason for you now to be my friend! Admit that I treated you shamefully. . ."

"I do admit it."

"But I was the most senseless, idiotic girl! Eugene Bondurant had suddenly fascinated me."

"I know he had."

"Ah, there lies your grievance!"

"Pardon me — I have no grievance."

"Of course you have not. You've outlived it!"

"Yes. I've outlived it."

"But it must have tortured you once. You loved me once. I know that so well!"

"Of course you know it."

She leaned her body toward him, and stared up into his face with her dark eyes, yet rich in charms of sleepy fire. "And that love is dead? Is it quite dead?"

"Yes, dead. Brutally killed, long ago. Treachery killed it."

She recoiled before the shock dealt by these quiet words. "Treachery?" she said, in bitter chagrin, below her breath.

"Yes. That. I think there is no more use of talk between you and me. It was all a good while ago. Old wounds may be touched, Alma, but the rheum and bane in them has flown away to make other foolish lovers' wounds burn and smart. There's the correlation and conservation of forces, you know. Modern science, and all that. We live in a scientific age. We don't merely tear butterflies to pieces; we put the dust of their wings under a microscope, and chemically analyze it."

His foot had almost reached the threshold of the door. "You came here simply to exult over me and laugh at me," she cried to him, "in my wretchedness!"

Her intensity, if real or feigned, told with him. "Your wretchedness?" he repeated.

She saw a point gained. She knew that he meant to leave her forever, and this perception nerved her to the sort of supplication which tact convinced her would tell, while the easy depths of her own self-pity might be stirred at her will into turbid violence.

"Call it my anguish!" she exclaimed, stretching both arms toward him, just as his foot had almost met the threshold of the door. "I was a girl — a silly, vain girl. Bondurant came with

his Byronic, sensational eyes, and his neat *blague* of love-making. I had always loved *you*, Lloyd. He tempted me away from you — there are things a woman, if her sense of shame isn't a cipher, can't express. But I always *loved* you. I — ”

“That is false,” Brockholst struck in. He might have been speaking the most ordinary phrase.

“It is not false, Lloyd! Listen to me. Don't go. Or, go afterward, if you will, but listen to me now! I was engaged to marry *you*. Bon-durant (you know all that has happened since!) was like a devil coming between us. I suddenly told you, one day, that I cared for *him*, that I must break with *you*, but it was not myself that spoke, Lloyd! It was the voice of — of — ”

“Good-night,” he said, with a very cold tone. He crossed the threshold, but as he did so she flung herself forward and caught one of his hands between both her own. Her form swayed, and in another minute, still retaining his hand, she had sunk on her knees before him. Then she pressed the hand against her lips, kissing it.

“Good-night,” said Brockholst, trying a little, but not over-strongly, to draw the hand away.

“You — you will not forgive me?” she pleaded, clinging to his hand.

“It is not that,” he said.

“What is it then?” she appealed, with uplifted face; and at this moment her dark gaze was swim-

ming in a tender glory where memories of past passion lit for him its potency of supplication.

“What is it, Lloyd? I have sinned against you — horribly, I grant it! I am weak, even contemptible! But I am not so changed that you can still refuse to see I am myself! And since I’ve passed through all this torment — oh, you can’t ever dream what it was till I’ve told you! — why not be friends with me — only friends — now that chance has thrown us together like this?”

The clutch of both her hands about his own discomfited Brockholst while it did not emotionally move him. He was a man, and this contact, so fervid and so insistent, wrought its due results with mere sense alone. But he smiled at the recollection of what that same impetuous pressure might have aroused in sentiment and in spiritual ecstasy long ago. It was this recollection that strengthened him now against the force which could only reach him through grosser mediums.

He shut his teeth, for an instant, swiftly reminding himself that here was the woman who had vowed love to him with hundreds of eager protestations years since, and who had suddenly shattered both faith and dream by one calmly agonizing announcement. The suffering seemed so remote to Brockholst, now; it was like the pang, fraught with speedy lulling tears, of early childhood. The pain, the looking about one and feeling that all sky and earth were equal as null,

neutral environments; the desire to die; the desire to let some few sympathetic hearts know why and for what fond cause one had died — all this actual record of life lived by him in other times took outline of shadow separate from his vivid and present individuality. Was this the Alma of his old adoration who now kneeled to him? And whence had flown that ardor of unquestioning sympathy which would have raised her with kisses and declarations of fealty?

“I am still your friend, if you choose,” he said. “Or, rather, I mean by this that I am not your foe. . . Good-night.” He snatched his hand away from the clinging clasp of both her own, and hurried out into the hall, soon afterward descending the steps that led to the little heliotrope-scented garden.

He had left her still kneeling at the threshold of the sitting-room. If he had seen the look that came into her face as she rose and passed back toward the chamber they had quitted, he might perhaps have been spared even the slight conscience-pang that was then assailing him.

‘Bah!’ he said to his thoughts, as he strode briskly along the darkened avenue leading homeward, ‘she is only Alma Hudsonbank — Alma Bondurant! I know her so well! It was so like her to kneel to me! She was always reminding one of the footlights! I know her feints and tricks so well — to my cost!’

Mrs. Bondurant had meanwhile thrown herself into the rocking-chair near the gayly-shaded lamp. She moved her frame excitedly to and fro. Her eyes were set on the opposite wall, her hands were clenched together in her lap.

‘What a failure,’ she mused. . . And somehow, for no very logical reason, her perturbed thoughts wandered to Isabel.



## VIII.

"YOU are home earlier than I expected," said a voice to Brockholst amid the dimness of his uncle's hall, which he had just entered. Carolan stood in the doorway of the lighted library.

"Yes," returned Brockholst. He at once passed into the library, with that frankly genial air which he so often employed unconsciously even toward men whom he held in no great esteem, and which made nearly everybody with whom he came into contact decide that he was companionable and attractive before reaching any other clear decision in respect to him. "It's cosey and comfortable here, isn't it?" he continued, dropping into a soft, wide chair near the lamplit table.

"Both," said Carolan, taking another chair, not far away. "I've spent some pleasant hours here among the books. There's no comfort to a man like reading. It can make him snap his fingers at the tedium of solitude."

Brockholst lit one of his excellent cigars and offered another to Carolan, which the latter accepted with evident satisfaction. "I suppose you have a good deal of solitude to contend with here," said Brockholst, as he began to smoke.

"Oh, a vast amount of it. The place is dull beyond conception. I'm still young enough to feel the need of amusements and distractions. As for employing my leisure in something literary, I begin to feel that when you've dashed off journalistic trifles for quite an age with a fatally glib pen, you may find that habit has put a rather wide gulf between ambition and ability."

Brockholst gave a civil little nod. He had already made up his mind that an apt talent for producing "copy" would mark the most probable terminus of Carolan's choicest achievement.

"I hope your discovery," he said, "hasn't cost you any severe sense of defeat."

"Oh, no" returned Carolan jovially. "I've been spared that anguish. If the truth must dawn on me that I'm only a scribbler and not a genius, I'm sure that I've got nerve enough to accept such a fate with stoicism. It would have prevented so many bad books, you know, if more human beings had recognized their own mediocrity in the proper season." Carolan had intentionally turned the talk into just this particular channel, and he now went on, with a clear purpose that he tried to veil under the most ordinary conversational carelessness. "It certainly is astonishing how many men and women rush into authorship nowadays without the least actual qualification for such office. There's altogether too much boldness and too little genuine merit

among modern authors. Don't you agree with me?"

"Yes," replied Brockholst. "But I dare say it has always been that way. Literature is like nature; it has its thousands of nipped blossoms and blighted fruits. The many fail; the one succeeds. That appears to be the inevitable certainty. But a large, continual effort is no doubt best. Art gains by it in the end."

"Still, a little more modesty would prove refreshing," said Carolan, while he looked at his companion with a scrutiny whose covert keenness was far from being suspected. "I should feel gratefully surprised, for example, to hear of anybody who had written something which he was willing to let lie unpublished, and which he could frankly confess that he did not believe society would be any wiser or better for having read."

Brockholst gave a slight start, and then blew a smoke-cloud of undue volume, which almost hid his face as he replied:

"And do you hold such a miracle of humility impossible?"

"Yes — like all miracles."

Brockholst laughed. "I might be able to dissipate your scepticism, perhaps," he said.

Carolan assumed to be greatly surprised by these words. "You?" he asked, with a sort of jocose innocence. "How?"

His companion was perfectly deceived. This

Irishman always had arts of pretended frankness and sincerity at command which could catch tripping the surest experience.

“Well,” said Brockholst, leaning back a little in his chair, with the manner of one to whom rumination was not just then uncongenial, “what if I should tell you that I had written something in my younger years which I thought so poorly of that I never even made an effort to print it? I’ve no doubt, when I recollect the thing now, that it was fairly readable. I can’t help believing that there must be stuff at the book-stalls to-day quite as crude, sentimental and unwholesome. But I did it, and after it was done I simply threw it aside. It was a novel—of course. Why do fledgling authors always write novels? I suppose that because of all conceivable crafts for the man who would write capably, that of the novel needs a most true native gift. Perhaps I had some such feeling of self-scorn—I hope that I was sensible enough to have it—when I flung aside ‘Marian Moore,’ without an effort to get the story put between covers.”

“That was the name, then—‘Marian Moore’?” said Carolan. He spoke in the most natural tone of inquiry.

“Yes. It must be among Uncle Andreas’s odds and ends of waste matter, somewhere. Or perhaps he has destroyed it. I wonder if he would remember about it if I should ask him.”

"No; I don't think he would remember anything like that," said Carolan.

"I mentioned it to Miss Coggeshal to-night," resumed Brockholst. "I walked home with her from Mrs. Bondurant's."

"Ah? yes?" answered Carolan pleasantly. He felt for a few seconds as if the room were whirling round with him.

"It came up during a little talk we had about novels and critics, and all that. She is really a very agreeable girl. I quite indorse your opinion of her."

"Indeed?" said Carolan, looking at his cigar.

"And her father? Is he a clever writer, really?"

"He has capacity — considerable of it."

"She seems to be very proud of him."

"Oh, that's natural enough."

"But she strikes me as a girl of nice taste and judgment in nearly everything."

"I should say she was."

"Have you read any of her father's books?"

"Yes — several."

"He's recently written one, I hear, which has made a popular hit. Do you know it?"

"Yes."

"What is its name? I heard, but I forget."

"It is called 'Rachel Rand,'" said Carolan. He wondered if there were not a little tremor in his voice as he thus spoke. The truth was past

all shadow of doubt, now. It seemed to glare at him from every square-inch of the walls, the carpet, the furniture.

“‘Rachel Rand?’” repeated Brockholst. “That has a neat, trim suggestion about it. One somehow thinks of a Boston girl. It’s much less romantic than ‘Marian Moore.’”

‘Good God!’ thought Carolan. ‘If he knew it *was* ‘Marian Moore’ what might he not do?’

“I suppose,” Brockholst proceeded, “that it’s something after the modern American school; eh?”

“I’m afraid I don’t just know what the modern American school is,” replied Carolan.

He was asking himself, at the same moment, if from all the innumerable different sequences of circumstance fate had ever yet devised one resembling that which he was now suddenly and most tryingly called upon to face. What had lately struck him as a suspicious coincidence in the way of handwriting had abruptly become vivid, alarming fact. He had already felt the self-protective impulse, but it had gone with a mortified thrill at the thought of Coggeshal perhaps revealing just what share he himself had taken in the whole craven fraud. Such new peril of betrayal did not at all harmonize with Carolan’s high-flown ideal of the passion-goaded delinquent. On hearing the truth Brockholst might easily include within his summary definition of scoundrelism



the temptation which had preceded the theft. Guilt quickly strives to build for itself barriers of defence. Carolan, with a sense of things crashing about his ears, had already thought of how he could save himself from the least real hurt. Yes, it could only be in one way: entire denial of complicity. And yet the man whose brain-labor had been stolen might retort by simply declaring: "You sanctioned the crime with your silence. Knowing it, you should have exposed it, and your neglect to do so has put a dark blot on your honesty." And then — Isabel! What earthly inducement could she now have for joining her fortunes with his own? This whole affair of the larceny might now end for himself in nothing but sickening disaster. These considerations were all assailing the man's mind at once, and seemed to whirl through it with the speed of a gust bred by tempest. And meanwhile the composed, reflective tones of Lloyd Brockholst were saying near by, with placidity enough to make it appear as if his zones of mental calm had never been ruffled by a hint of emotional storm:

"The modern American school, I should put it, is a kind of Zola-ism at once spiritualized and made more commonplace. In any event, it is extraordinarily French; I am beginning to feel more and more amazed at the whole exotic quality of its development. Nothing can be harder to reconcile with our limitless topography, our im-

ments of lakes and prairies, our general national spaciousness, than are at once the minute regard for trifles and the close analyses of human motive shown by this sudden unaccountable crop of writers."

He paused, expecting that Carolan would either differ from him or else amplify what he had just rather indolently hazarded as an opinion. The Irishman had always before been of so expansive a turn; he had required so little encouragement for the outflow of facile *pros* and *cons*. But Carolan merely bowed his head somewhat absently, murmuring:

"Yes. I see your meaning, now. I hadn't thought of it in that . . . a . . . curious light."

Brockholst shifted in his chair, and gave a glance at his watch. It had occurred to him that his uncle's loquacious henchman was not disposed to be very entertaining this warm and drowsy evening. "By the way," he said carelessly, "have you a copy of this 'Rachel Rand'? I should like to take a look at it."

Carolan felt himself turn pale. The book-laden table was between Brockholst and himself, within easy reach of either. As Carolan's eyes now swept the contents of the table he perceived the book in an instant; he knew its cover at a glance; and then he recalled how he himself had placed it there but a day or two ago. It chanced to lie as far away as possible from the hand of his compan-

ion, and this discovery, which would have been as nothing only a slight time before, now held the value of a special providence for Carolan.

"No," he answered; "there isn't a copy of it here at the cottage."

"I suppose I can borrow it some time to-morrow from the author himself," said Brockholst.

"Oh, no doubt. Did you intend to call on them, over there?"

"Yes. Miss Coggeshal was good enough to ask me. Still, now that I recollect, it will not be to-morrow — at least not during the day-time. I've an engagement which will take me into town. Well, I'll get the book at some shop. I suppose it's procurable nearly everywhere, as it's so popular?"

"Oh, yes."

Brockholst had risen, and thrown away his half-smoked cigar. "I feel a little tired," he said, and the words were true, although he was well aware that his interview with Alma Bondurant had stirred depths in him which sleep was not destined quickly to pacify. "Shall you sit up for an hour or two longer and read?" he continued to Carolan. "I suspect that is your intention."

"Well . . yes . . perhaps," Carolan replied; and a few seconds later, when Brockholst had left the room and was clearly heard by him ascending the stairs, he wondered just what reply he had really given.

And then, in another instant, he sprang up from his chair, caught the copy of "Rachel Rand," and had soon torn both its leaves and binding into almost unrecognizable fragments, holding the book over a waste-basket while he thus mutilated it.

A sense of how utterly futile was this act tormented him during its brief accomplishment. His pillow that night was visited with far less of sleep than Brockholst's, for all that the latter had memories of past pain to haunt him. Carolan felt a fierce antagonism against the man who had thus dawned suddenly upon the scene of his proposed triumph. Before dawn it was hostility that had blackened into hatred, since fear was not the least of the bitter agencies that fed it. When the truth transpired, as now there seemed no preventive against its promptly and inevitably doing, Coggeshal's bruited guilt must of necessity smirch himself. Almost cursefully he already found his thoughts dwelling upon Brockholst. Had not this favorite of destiny, with his thousands a year and his command of nearly every mundane pleasure, some less horrid office to fill than that of tearing Isabel out of his own future? For that was what a simple glance at the stolen book by Andreas Chadwick's nephew must, in ruining Coggeshal, certainly effect. Suppose that he even forgave Coggeshal, through pity for his family — or solely through pity for the very daughter whom

he had just met and liked. Where, even in that juncture, would Carolan's hope remain tangible? Would not such a merciful attitude on Brockholst's part make the man who had been an abettor in the crime if not a committer of it, powerless to assume any other rôle except that of grateful escape? It could be no longer he himself saving Isabel on his own terms — to put the matter with a brutality that now but faintly resembled the old theatrical glamour by which it was before enveloped; it would be Brockholst saving her on *his* own terms, through leniency to both criminal and accomplice. And he, Carolan, had unquestionably been the last. Under no circumstances would Brockholst, learning just who had had the custody of his uncle's papers, take any less austere view.

Meanwhile the distressed and thwarted plotter had concluded that to inform Coggeshal of his own danger would be worse than folly. Who could say what precipitate confession he would then make, and thus disregard the sole happy contingency that Brockholst might never read the book at all? His reading of it might fail to occur. True, a single effort toward securing that end might hasten the dreaded opposite, and yet there was one method which could harmlessly be employed.

Carolan possessed four or five of Coggeshal's authentic novels. Their perusal had bored him more than a little, since he was unable to win

pleasure from the evident purity of their art, and found in their repose, their lack of surface-glitter, a monotony which wiser critics would by no means have condemned. But Carolan was no critic at all, except where grace and color and sparkle were concerned, and his favorite novelist was one who makes all his characters talk with an equal dash of epigram and locates them all amid surroundings of an equal attraction. This morning he had risen at quite an early hour, and spent considerable time before breakfast in marking certain passages of two novels by Coggeshal which he considered least insufferably dull. He knew the fascination that a marked book can exert over most readers. Taking for granted that Brockholst would pronounce both these volumes as stupid as he also had done, Carolan nevertheless clung to the straw-like hope that his employer's kinsman would be delayed by an examination of them from immediately procuring "Rachel Rand." And such delay might mean indefinite procrastination; who could truly prophesy that it would not so mean? Then, a mere glance at his own story would not assure Brockholst of the lie used. Every name of every personage had been changed, and he must give more than a superficial glance at the work, after all these years, for the sheath of deceit now wrapping it to fall apart under his scrutiny.

Carolan sent the two books to Brockholst's room,



and then took his solitary breakfast with an appetite none the better for worriment and trepidation. He had scarcely got through his meal when Mr. Chadwick's bell rang. He went up-stairs with more briskness than spurred his usual obedience to the summons; impending duties would perhaps partially benumb him as regarded the menace of near events.

Mr. Chadwick had to be put into his flowered dressing-gown, with various menial acts of service before such result was reached. No one but Carolan could perform these requirements, and even as the adept he was tacitly esteemed scarcely anything that he did went unassailed by a turbid flow of peevishness. But after the invalid had been placed in his chair near a window that looked upon the sightly, drab-tinted arches of High Bridge, with their undulate and sylvan stretch of intermediate country, and had got his slice of toast and his cup of cocoa, he was nearly always in a much milder humor. Then, as this morning, he would commence to babble his irrelevancies, his vagaries, his *fade* reminiscences, his errant and fortuitous impressions, between the sips of the cocoa and the nibbled morsels of the toast.

"Bless my soul," he now began, with the little nodding of his bare, pink, glazed head, at either of whose temples bushed forth a tuft of hair as white as carded wool, "I'm very glad that Lloyd has come back from Europe — very glad indeed . .

Isn't that toast rather tough this morning? and the butter . . are you *sure* it's real Philadelphia butter? That was what I always had at the Metropolitan Club — nice Philadelphia butter. They had it there to perfection . . I remember when the butter in New York was all bad — as bad, bless my soul, as could possibly be! That was an age ago, though, 'way back in Eighteen-Fifty-One. No, I'm inclined to think it was a good deal earlier. None of the best New York people knew how to eat. I taught 'em, Carolan." (He always remembered Carolan's name, though there was scarcely a single other which he could infallibly recall.) "It was after I first came back from Europe. You're good at figures; you can calculate how long ago it is between the year Thirty-Four and now. . What a voyage home I had, that first time! Forty days from . . from Southpool. . . No, bless my soul, not quite so long as that, was it? And *is* it Southpool? Yes — no. *Is* it, Carolan?"

"Liverpool," said Carolan, officially and perfunctorily. He had done this sort of thing so many times before; it was such an old story to him. This morning he perhaps did it with less than his habitual languor. The end of all association with Andreas Chadwick, as either valet, secretary or counsellor, seemed now so imminent an event!

"Oh, yes — Liverpool. Bless my soul, I hope

I'm not losing my memory! No, it was only a slip. We're all liable to a slip. Isn't that so, Carolan? A slip of . . of the tongue — that's it. Is slip of the tongue right, or slip of the pen — which?"

"Both, sir."

"Both, eh?" He laughed a wheezy, rasping laugh, that seemed the very burnt-out embers of all human mirth. His profile, seen sharp against the lucid window, had a forlorn, shattered-looking beauty. He had once been very handsome; the contour of his shrivelled profile, where not a vestige of whisker or moustache lingered, still told of its vanished aquiline delicacy. A flower had been put into the button-hole of his dressing-gown, a few inches from his wrinkled, attenuated chin; it was one of his vassal's regular tasks always to put that flower there; he would have been inconsolable without it; his cocoa and toast would have tasted ill to him unless he had been decked with it.

"Both right," he went on, nodding, and laughing deep down in his throat. "Trust me for memory. I only wish my legs were as strong as my head. I'd like to stroll about more; I'd like to take a walk in Broadway, and cross over from Bowling Green to the Battery, and see all the pretty girls there of an afternoon . . Bless my soul, how I used to flirt with 'em, Carolan! There was Eliza Van Corlear; they said we'd make a match.

But it fell out — and all through that trouble about the Trinity Church pew. You see, her father, old Peter Van Corlear, had rented — But never mind about the Van Corlear pew in Trinity. I'm sick and tired of that story; everybody is, by this time; ain't *you*, Carolan? Oh, I forgot; you! *you!* why, how I'm a-wandering! You must have been a baby over in Ireland, then, if you was born at all. . What was I saying before that? What . . what . . er . . was I talking about? Bless my soul if I . . er . . just recollect."

"You spoke of your toast being tough, sir," said Carolan, with less than his ordinary mechanical phlegm. He was thinking how soon all image of this pathetic and ridiculous old man might be laid among the shadows of his own past. "And you said, sir, that people here in town didn't really know about eating till you taught them."

"Oh . . ah . . yes . . did I say that? Well, bless my soul, it's true. They used to dine on chops and steaks at two o'clock. I showed 'em what a late dinner was, with a nice, clear soup and a little good claret. That was before the Metropolitan Club came 'way up town into Fifth Avenue — bless my soul, yes! And then, you see, society got changing. Folks popped up as nabobs that nobody'd ever heard of before. We old Knickerbockers made a stand — yes, we did! We wouldn't have 'em, and we didn't have 'em.

Mrs. Bleecker Houston — Mary Van Courtlandt that was — she just sifted right and left, and I helped her sift, too. Bless me, if I didn't! She gave a party, and didn't invite one of the upstart folks. They were mad as hornets, but we didn't care. There wasn't any . . any Wall Street to speak of then. Lots of new folks got in that way . . . I was a middle-aged man when we Knickerbockers took our stand and made our fight, but afterward I quit the whole damned business. They said I was a purse-proud snob; I didn't like that, when I heard it, and my gout was beginning about that time, and Maria Bleecker — she was Maria Houston before she married — had gone off quite suddenly, and I . . I pulled in my horns and didn't care any more. I let the new folks have their own way. They had it, too. They've got it now, I suppose. There's hardly any of the old stock left . . hardly a bit! . .”

A little later Brockholst knocked at his uncle's door. Carolan, while receiving him with quiet courtesy, felt his very presence act like an offensive jeer.

Mr. Chadwick welcomed his nephew with profuse cordiality. Brockholst had to hear lengths of voluminous discourse about his parents' past life and that of half his relations, before he found himself enabled to ask with any surety of being heeded:

“Uncle Andreas, do you recall my once having

written a novel, which I left with you just as I was going to Europe the last time? It was a love-story, you know, and I told you to look it over, if you cared to do that, and if not to save it for me among your papers, so that I might have the sober fun at some future day of seeing what buncombe I'd been guilty of in my earlier manhood. *Do you remember, uncle Andreas?*"

He stood beside his uncle's chair as he thus spoke, with one hand resting on the old man's thin, frail shoulder. Mr. Chadwick looked up into his nephew's clear, healthful eyes with his own of so hazy and faded a blue. Then he slowly shook his head. "No, my boy," he answered, hesitatingly and with a little quiver or two of his pale lips that signified qualms of dismay. "Bless my soul, Lloyd, you — you don't mean I've forgotten a thing like that! I sometimes do wonder if my head isn't at times a little bit cloudy. But Carolan says not, don't you, Carolan?" Here he looked up again, very wistfully, and with what seemed to his nephew a world of involuntary self-pity. "Now and then," he went on, "those old days do seem all jumbled together, as might be said — like things we've dreamed about and yet can't quite remember." He drooped his head and tapped one of his temples with one withered and veiny hand: "A novel of yours . . . a love-story . . . Lydia's son, Lloyd, wrote it . . . now it seems to me as if I *did* recollect something about your put-



ting it in my charge." He glanced up suddenly, with a spark pricking tinily the filmed, murky color of his eyes. "It was written in French, wasn't it?"

But meanwhile Carolan had managed to catch the glance of Brockholst and had made him a quick, admonitory duo of gestures, first touching his own forehead and then sleepily drooping his lids. Brockholst at once understood that he meant these efforts of memory might bring about injurious fatigue.

"Never mind bothering yourself with the matter at all, uncle," he said in the most gently soothing tones, which still carefully avoided any of that overt compassion so especially disliked, sometimes, by the old when ill. "It really isn't of the least consequence. Mr. Carolan will let me rummage among your old papers, no doubt, and there I may find my youthful scroll." He now turned to Carolan. "You'll aid me in the search, will you not?" he asked, smiling.

"Certainly," said Carolan.

Not long afterward he conducted Brockholst to the attic, where two large chests were, in one of which had been found the manuscript its author had so lightly and unsuspectingly mentioned.

"I don't think you will come across anything of that kind here," he told Mr. Chadwick's nephew, with his tones very steady, and schooled to counterfeit thorough indifference. "It seems

to me that in going over what both the chests contain I would have noticed a . . . work such as you describe." His voice faltered a little, toward the end of the last sentence, in spite of his control. He dared not trust himself to speak further on the subject; already, perhaps, it occurred to him, he had said too much. His most ordinary comment might only sink him deeper in conviction hereafter; even the greater his coolness, his freedom from the faintest perturbation, such command might weigh more damagingly against him to-morrow. He had soon lifted both the rather heavy lids, and brought from a corner one or two remnants of old carpet, spreading these in front of the two open chests. Then he prepared to slip down-stairs in silence.

"I should know my great masterpiece the minute I lighted on it," laughed Brockholst, as he set his knees to the carpet with that gingerly reluctance of posture by which the modern male shows his respect for our prevalent stringencies of tailoring. "It was a rather bulky mass of foolscap, and its top leaf bore only the name of the romance, with a modest suppression of the author's."

Carolan, standing behind him in the little hot, sunlit garret, almost bit his lip till the blood came.

"Did you have time to glance over either of the books I sent you?" he asked. "I suppose not Mr. Brockholst."

"Oh, yes," answered Brockholst, who was now peering into one of the chests, and removing document, pamphlet, old newspaper, whatever came first to hand, "pray excuse me for not having thanked you sooner. I looked through the smaller of the books, and read two or three chapters at breakfast; I'm a speedy reader, you know, but please acquit me of being one of those irritating skimmers. I've read every word as far as I've got, and I've been most agreeably surprised." He paused, for a moment, and then looked over his shoulder toward Carolan. "I can't explain, by the by," he added, "why on earth I should put it that way, never having even met Mr. Coggeshal. My agreeable surprise would certainly strike him as a most impertinent piece of patronage. But no doubt an author of his apparent productiveness must have learned before now what it is to be praised with a big pinch of condescension."

"You liked what you read, then?"

"Oh, yes; decidedly." Brockholst had re-begun his quest. "The man writes with ease and style. I should say, however, that it was for old heads rather than young ones, and for quiet tastes in fiction rather than the cravers after sharp excitements. Yes, he pleases me so far; he has studied good models. Of course, I don't know yet how he deals with character, but he certainly impresses me as promising well."

Carolán left the attic soon afterward, saying that he had some affairs requiring attention below. In less than an hour Brockholst joined him, and of course announced that his search had been a failure. "But it's not of the slightest consequence," he continued. "Those are all of uncle Andreas's papers that you know about, by the way?"

"Yes, all," said Carolán, feeling how this falsehood might tell against him when the crash came — if it *did* come.

Brockholst took out his watch, saying with a dry hint of fun that he feared his ardor to gaze on the fruit of his perished youth might make him late for an appointment with his lawyer; and immediately he passed out on the High Bridge road-side, now almost as breezy as it had yesterday been breathless. His walk to the station of the Elevated Road soon brought him in front of the Coggeshals' house. No face was at any of its windows, though all were open, and at some of them he saw the loops of muslin curtains swaying in the pleasant wind. He thought of Isabel's sweet face, and would have liked to see her just then and exchange a bow with her. His would have been an affable bow; perhaps if she had been on the porch he would have stopped at the gate, regardless of that legal appointment, and exchanged a few words with her as well. Such an occurrence, imagined swiftly during his progress

past the house, took most welcome hues, and vanished from fancy with a little touch of genuine disappointment.

But Isabel was at that moment with her father in his study. She was looking at him, too, with shocked surprise, for he had just said something which to her judgment warranted both surprise and annoyance.

"Mr. Carolan, papa!" she was exclaiming. "You can't be serious!"

"I am serious," replied Coggeshal. "You might care for a very much worse man, pray let me tell you."

"But I don't care for him the least in the world!" asserted Isabel, with her best maidenly haughtiness.

Coggeshal shrugged his shoulders. He had shifted his position several times since his conversation with Isabel had begun, and he was now erect, looking out on the rear enclosure, where the red turrets of the hollyhocks trembled in the breeze and the bright disks of the marigolds had got a new burnish from the altered weather. It was a day to lift heavy spirits, with its movement and shine after the lethargy and dimness of yesterday. But it had not lifted the spirits of Coggeshal. Something had occurred to him, during that talk there in the starlight, which made him proof against all barometric enlivenments. He turned to Isabel as she spoke those last words,

and there was a light of disapproval playing coldly in his eyes and seeming to reflect its harshness into the very crevice of his closed lips. The girl drew several steps back from him without consciousness of the recoil. But her father saw it very plainly, and it did not seem at all to please him.

"Oh, build your matrimonial castles if you will," he said, with a laugh that rang almost cynically to Isabel's hurt ears. "When you're a spinster of forty-five, my dear, you'll see the full value of such airy architecture!"

Isabel felt the mist rise in her sight as her heart sank. These words were so unlike her father! She swallowed her gathering tears bravely, though, and said with what seemed only the heat of vexation:

"I never built any matrimonial castles, papa, and you know it. I never feared to be a spinster at forty-five, or at any other age. Indeed, I've always said, since I began really to reflect on this subject, that if marriage were not made the be-all and end-all of a girl's existence she might find time to think of many other things quite as essential to her real happiness. . However, that does not concern my relations to Mr. Carolan in the slightest degree; for the idea of my marrying *him* never even remotely entered my brain, and never would have entered it, if you had not burst it upon me, just now, to my piercing



amazement. Not," pursued Isabel, a little wildly and unsettledly, "that I dislike him in the least. I" —

"Evidently you like him very much!" broke in her father, as if to himself now, still staring out of the window in sombre reverie.

"No — not that I dislike him in the least, papa. But he falls wholly beneath any ideal that I could possibly have!"

"Ah?"

The little word, spoken by her father with a slow, latent belligerence, cut her to the heart. He had never been like this to her of old. He had always brimmed toward her with tenderness, protectiveness and sympathy. She turned pale, now, and went up much closer to him.

"Papa," she began, "you told me a short time ago that you thought Mr. Carolan liked me — that he had said to you he liked me. Did he say also that he wanted to marry me?"

"He said something not very far away from it."

"But did he say *it*?"

"Well . . . yes."

Isabel's eyes swept her father's face in a dubious, puzzled, startled manner. "And you?" she murmured. "Papa, what answer did you give him?"

Coggeshal met her anxious and imperative gaze with one that was vacillating and evasive; but

the sternness still lingered about his lips as he replied:

"I told him to plead his own suit. That is always the best answer in such cases."

"Did you say *that*, papa?" cried Isabel. "Did you tell him *that*, when you knew —?" She suddenly paused, but the penetration of her look was now more reproachful while it was equally keen.

"Knew what?" he asked.

"Never mind," she faltered, turning away and walking toward the door of the study.

Coggeshal dropped into the seat beside his desk. "You might just as well not pose impossible questions to me," he exclaimed, with what he meant to pass for a grim candor. "Carolan certainly doesn't insult you by wanting to marry you. I think I am as good a judge on that point as you are, Isabel." He raised both hands, and waved them before him in a nervously scornful fashion. "Act as you please, however. Treat him with your best contempt if you think he has ever done any thing to merit it . . . There, I shall not speak another word on the subject."

Isabel remained scanning his face for several moments. Then, as if stirred by a very impetuosity of feeling, she came with haste toward him till she stood close at his side. She placed a hand on either of his shoulders and peered into his features.

"You are so changed!" she cried. "You are

different in every way from what you once were! You would not have spoken to me like this a few weeks ago! And lately you have done much, you have said much, papa, that I could not account for! Haven't we talked together, before now, of — of this Bourke Carolan? Is *he* to be any reason why we shouldn't remain the dear, devoted friends we've always been? Have you meant, all this time, papa, that you were sorry I thought him light and — and insincere? Do answer me! Do answer me as you know I want you to answer! Don't look at me in that cold way! If he — if that man — has . . . has got any power over you, papa, why, tell me — tell me all — and I . . .” He pushed her from him, and as he did so his face was more angry than she had ever seen it.

“Any power over me,” she heard his lips repeat, in a half-whisper. But at once he spoke aloud.

“You talk as if you were crazed, Isabel — or as if I were.” He was still seated, and the chair he had taken was the easy-wheeling one that fronted his desk. He made his body swerve round in it, and went on speaking while he seized a pen from the desk and dipped it into his inkstand. “I have my work to do. Don't stay any longer — you'll disturb me. And cut Carolan dead the next time you meet him, if you think best. . There, now, my child, I told you I would not speak another word on the subject, and I've done so. But this, I promise you, is my last!”

His face was averted from her as he bent over the desk. He waved dismissal to her with one hand. Soon afterward he heard her leave the room. When certain that she had closed the door behind her, he rose, and with tremulous lips and an attitude of entire dejection, murmured louder than his disarray permitted him to know: "Poor Isabel? How nearly right the girl's love for me made her guess!" Then he slipped toward the door, in act to lock it.

But Isabel, her heart sick with longing to learn more than she had learned, was lingering in bitter concern at the outer threshold. And those few words, uttered aloud by her father, had reached her ears.

'It *is* Carolan,' she thought, gliding away. 'He would never have spoken to me like that without some reason. There has been a mystery, a secret, from the first; and I believe now that Carolan is behind it all.'

Isabel did not realize what a cogent human force she might suddenly have become, in thus silently avowing herself a woman with a secret which she desired eagerly to discover.

## IX.

THE next few hours of the day were for Isabel big with social requirements. Clarry Coulter, by some particular leniency of his employers at the bank, had obtained the rare boon of a day's release. His betrothed had conceived the idea of "entertaining" his mother and sister at luncheon. Sadie looked upon this feast as an affair of ritual impressiveness. It was to be episodic, commemorative; it was to record the alliance of two families, not socially equal, but now bonded by the mutually approved terms of graciousness from one and deference from the other.

The Coulters, mother and daughter, were prepared to exhibit a good deal of solid deference. Mrs. Coulter had an impassioned regard for both her children. She thought the beauty of her daughter, Laretta, angelical, and that of her son, Clarence, phenomenal. The virtues of both were to her extraordinary; this adoring mother was never tired of mingling rosy encomium with the most every-day accounts of their doings. "My Clarry" and "my Retta" could not walk a mile, so to speak, but they were accredited by their

mother with marvellous endurance or exceptional speed in a journey of ten. If Retta danced at an evening entertainment (of which there were a forlorn few during the winter months at High Bridge) some enraptured male was sure to remark in Mrs. Coulter's hearing that "the young lady with the dark eyes that flashed so was the most elegant lady-dancer he had ever seen," — or something similarly rich in its eulogy. If Clarry accompanied his mother and sister to church on a Sunday morning (which it cannot be chronicled of even so model a son and brother that he infallibly did) somebody was almost certain to pronounce him "stylish-looking as he could be" or "a real lady-killer," within the distinct hearing of his mother. It may have been that this all-comprehending maternal regard had its own airy familiars who whispered to her these praises of her pets, and that apart from such imaginative authority the loving lady had none whatever for the statements made regarding her progeny. And if this were true it is only additional proof of how hardy and flourishing had always been the stems and leaves of her really splendid optimism. Many another woman would long ago have sunk in hopeless collapse under that relentless continuance of troubles which had left her still young and not seldom merry-hearted as well. But Mrs. Coulter had preserved an invariable buoyancy against all the pressures of



calamity. She had been the literal sport and butt of a husband who had married her with protestations of deceit, and who had finally abandoned her, to die as a debauchee, shot in a Chicago gambling-hell under conditions of glaring shame. But she had never lost her clinging tenderness for her dead lord. He had been mislead; he was not half so bad as he had seemed; he had not deserted her except with an idea of coming back wealthy from his mining-schemes in Nevada. Meanwhile she would have starved under such desertion but for the aid of a more prosperously married sister, who had aided her with more calculation than promptitude. But Mrs. Nevins, who had married a ready-made-clothing tailor of striking enterprise, and who occupied a narrow but very ornate brown-stone residence in One-Hundred-and-Sixth Street, not far from Third Avenue, was to the eyes of Mrs. Coulter a source of perpetual rebuke. Not that she ever told her sister, Susan, how very different it *might* have been if their positions were reversed. Oh, no — *indeed* no! “I would rather bite my tongue off than let Susan know what I *feel*,” Mrs. Coulter had more than once averred. This was before “my Clarry” grew up and got into his present place at the bank. By about the same time Retta had developed a talent for those kinds of effective needle-craft which the shops were willing to purchase. Now, with very much less help from her luckier sister, Mrs. Coulter was

enabled to preside over her modest but proudly genteel little household. And she exulted in her present dearly-bought security. She had not for years had any thing half so solvent, so serene, so unvexed. No souvenirs of financial embarrassment ever haunted her. She was getting along famously, and had everything on earth to be thankful for. She was exceedingly pious, having long ago become a convert to the Baptist Church. She often openly wondered how anybody could for an instant doubt the great goodness of God. She was very easily moved to tears by anything which seemed to her "affecting" in a sermon, but although she had been known to sob audibly in her pew-seat over the eloquence of her High Bridge pastor, she had always managed to see — through her blinding tears, as it were — the last tasteful novelty in a fellow-worshipper's bonnet or gown. She was by no means insincere; her heart bounded with sympathy at a tale of suffering, and her aid was ready at the least call of those whom it could profit. She had often sacrificed her rest in the nursing of the sick, and there were few humane tasks which she had ever dreamed of shirking, if once clearly convinced that no better hands than hers could perform them. But with all her intrinsic goodness and sweetness of soul, she was outwardly clad in artificiality and pretension. She aspired as much to beam and tower in the little world where circumstance had set her, as

if she had been some leader of society in Fifth or Madison avenues, with power by a nod of the head to let X —, Y — or Z — obtain a card for the next select meeting of Delmonico “Patriarchs” or “Assemblies.” Indeed, wherever she was, there lay her social vantage-ground. She wanted to be a great person in the little village-like place where destiny had now drifted her, just as much as if she had found it her right to be a great person under conditions of the most patrician *empressement* elsewhere.

She thought Clarry’s engagement a very honoring event, and she carried her head higher for several days on account of it. She could not endure Mr. Herbert Coggeshal’s novels (and she was both a reader and a lover of certain novels) until she felt assured that Clarry was really to wed Sadie. Then she not only read every line Coggeshal had written, but declared vehemently that its author was a master of his craft. “Rachel Rand” amazed her by the popularity it had won. Oh, *yes!* The others were so much “deeper,” and full of such “beautiful language”! She made her daughter read the works likewise, and then at once gave out, among the little pseudo-aristocracy which she had created for herself in the neighborhood, that Retta thought Mr. Coggeshal *the* greatest author anywhere to be found. Retta, like herself, secretly preferred such tales as those of Mrs. May Agnes Fleming; but to thrill over the

anguish of Olivia the Deserted or Constantia the Bride of an Hour was a very different thing from having "our Clarry" become the husband of the daughter of a highly intellectual man. Clarry had never cared for May Agnes Fleming's productions. He had thus far, with his mild cult for Thackeray and George Eliot, represented a kind of literary undiscovered country to his mother and sister.

Mrs. Coulter had been perfectly candid with Isabel on their first meeting. Isabel was the "smart sister" whom Clarry had spoken of, and since the engagement was now a *fait accompli*, Clarry's mother saw no reason why candor should be at all evaded.

"Nobody in High Bridge knows we're poor," she had said to Isabel. She rolled her handsome eyes — still so full of luminance, as they beamed from her small, fine-featured face — toward this other highly intellectual member of the Coggeshal family. "We *are* poor, Miss Coggeshal, but nobody knows it! I won't keep any thing from *you*, now. Not that we're ever necessiated. Still whatever good appearance we make is on very little. Oh, yes, *very*. But we *do* make it, and I suppose you're glad to hear that there's nobody in High Bridge who thinks we're not very well off indeed."

Isabel had expressed no delight at all at this intelligence, but Mrs. Coulter had continued confidentially:

“Why, last week, Mrs. Delahanty dropped in one morning. You may know Mrs. Delahanty; she lives a little way up on the hill, in that pink house with the blue shades. The Delahantys are very fine people indeed. *He’s* in the hardware-business.” This was said as grandly as if it had been: “*He’s* a partner of Brown Brothers, the Wall Street bankers.” “I asked Mrs. Delahanty to stay to lunch. She’s a superb-looking elderly lady; we got acquainted with her at church; she was a . . . a Miss Smith of Hoboken, you know; the Smiths (or Schmitts, I believe you should call them — they’re of German descent) have a large brewery there. She wears her hair in two big gray puffs, and gets all her dresses made down at the city. . . Well I asked Mrs. Delahanty to stay to lunch, without actually thinking that we had nothing *much* in the house but some cold ham and stewed prunes. When she accepted I felt real frightened; you know how you *do* get feeling. But I just slipped away for a few minutes and left her with Retta, and went down into the kitchen, and knocked up a pan of sponge-cake, and put it into the oven. Then I came back, and Retta, she slipped off and saw that the cake didn’t burn or any thing, and at lunch our Jane served it nice and hot, and Mrs. Delahanty — why, she eat three pieces and said it was light as a feather and melted in her mouth. I gave our Jane the wink (she’s as ’cute a girl as you ever saw) and “Oh, yes,

ma'am," said Jane, speaking to *me*, as meek as Moses, "I had very good luck to-day." Now I feel sure that Mrs. Delahanty believes we have sponge-cake nearly all the time. *Poor!* Why she don't dream we are!"

"I can't help being sorry," Isabel had answered, "that you should have been troubled by putting forth any effort to conceal your poverty. It certainly isn't a thing to be ashamed of, Mrs. Coulter. And you must let me tell-you that I can't think what you have possibly gained by seeking to hide it."

These, and a few similar remarks on the part of Isabel, had made Retta say to her mother, after the first interview with Sadie's sister had ended: "Well, dear *me!* Where's Queen Victoria *now*, ma, *I'd* like to know!"

"I don't believe, Ret," said Mrs. Coulter, with oracular gravity, "that she's *really* stuck up. It's only a way. Some people have it. They get it by going to Europe sometimes."

"*Well!*" declared Retta, who had a blooming face and a luxuriously moulded figure, and whose beaux in High Bridge were already numerous not to say ardent. "*I* think I never saw a girl give herself *more* airs! Why, Sadie said we wouldn't like her much, perhaps, at first; but I guess I won't like such a high and mighty piece as she is any more to-morrow than I do to-day!"

Sadie had meanwhile captivated both mother



and daughter. They thought her "just *too* sweet," and exchanged mysterious hints of thanks that "our Clarry" had chosen her instead of Isabel. It seemed to both their fond hearts that if Clarry had set his bewildering eye upon Isabel she must have succumbed just as Sadie had done.

The invitation to luncheon was an affair of vast importance to the whole Coulter household. Clarry had secured his holiday, and Retta had her blue muslin with the white-edged flounces; but Mrs. Coulter had nothing to wear except her old and almost painfully familiar black *barège* with the red spots. A good many ladies would either have worn the *barège* or else remained at home. But Mrs. Coulter preferred to do neither. The dresses of her sister, Mrs. Nevins, fitted her almost perfectly; their figures were very nearly alike. Two or three days before the Coggeshal luncheon Mrs. Coulter called on "Sister Susan," and with a gradual *crescendo* of lamentation bewailed the scantiness of her wardrobe. Mrs. Nevins's mouth began to take a certain hardness, as though she knew quite well what was coming. And presently, with a nervous ripple of laughter, such as some women will give before the utterance of something for which they expect to be violently snubbed, Mrs. Coulter exclaimed: "I *was* thinking, Susan, that p'aps you might have enough pride about my going over there looking all right, as to lend me your lilac silk." There was an awful pause, and

then Mrs. Coulter gave another tittering laugh, and set her head sideways as if in embarrassment at her own temerity. But she had made her request, and she had come there that day with the fixed intention of making it. She was quite reconciled to rebuff, moreover, so long as she secured the loan of the lilac silk. And she did secure it, though "Sister Susan" said with a mixture of regret and sarcasm, after consenting to lend the garment: "*I* don't mind, Caroline, if *you* don't. But upon my word, I should think you would."

Mrs. Coulter did not, however. She was perfectly willing to shine in borrowed finery rather than not shine at all. She was just as much lacking in the delicacy which should have laid a veto upon the assumption of clothes not her own, as she was endowed with virtues of amiability and tenderness which often accompany the nicest refinement. She wore Mrs. Nevins's dress, and with what she felt sure was a much more effective air than "Sister Susan" ever could have worn it. She entirely forgot that it was not hers, and indeed said, during the course of the luncheon, when some one spoke of how agreeably the weather had changed: "Yes, it had got so much cooler by noon that I found I'd be comfortable in this silk instead of something thinner." But she had meant to wear the silk if the weather had been tropical, all the same.

It was to Isabel a most dreary entertainment.

At any other time the fictitious and spurious element that she so clearly discerned in both Mrs. Coulter and Lauretta would have amused her to no small extent. But at present the effect of her recent talk with her father had been to bathe her spirit in ominous anxiety. She had always thought the intimacy with Carolan a somewhat unexplainable one. And now that her father should have used words which made it seem as if he were desirous of serving Carolan in this new and piercingly unforeseen way, pointed with dark suggestiveness at all those past weeks of worriment, abstraction and mental gloom. Naturally Isabel had imagined the one solution of financial embarrassment, and the contraction of some weighty debt to the secretary of old Mr. Chadwick. But her fears had already gone further; she was ready enough, somehow, to distrust Carolan's principle at a moment's notice, though unswerving as to the faith which she reposed in her father's. But there were such things as honesty becoming entangled and involved by too rash an association with its complete opposite. There might lie the whole bitter kernel of the conjectured misfortune.

And yet was she not recklessly plunging into shadows that her own fancy had summoned? Her father looked and acted quite cheerfully, now, during the luncheon. It might all be a mere effort with him, and yet he treated Mrs. Coulter as if he thought her a very diverting person. As

for that lady herself, she was evidently delighted by the privilege of breathing his rarefied atmosphere. The quick little sips of tea which she took from one of her hostess's pretty china cups appeared to stimulate her like an elixir. She became reminiscent, and perhaps pardonably mendacious. It was to her so memorable a day! All our worldly triumphs are strictly relative to our environments, and what may be a mere fillet for one of us will serve as a tiara for another. She had never dreamed, poor woman, that "my Clarry" would ally her with a family like this, whose head rose majestically into the mists of literary eminence. With a resolution, a doggedness, a self-preservative instinct wholly American, she had kept herself and her children unassailed for years by the great calamitous wave which bears so many lives out on the vast shoreless ocean of utter poverty. She had clung to something that she both called and believed respectability, and she had clung in the teeth of untold buffetings. The Coggeshals were very humble people, from a general social point of view, and the novelist who presided over his board to-day, there in his little house at High Bridge, was a gentleman who had not yet secured even that meagre guerdon of distinction which our country sometimes accords to her literary sons. But Mrs. Coulter thought them by no means a humble family. They were several rungs of the ladder higher

than herself. "Sister Susan" had waked sensibly to this fact. She would never have loaned the lilac silk if she had not. She had dropped a palpable hint, too, that she would like to meet the Coggeshals. Such a hint, emanant from the brown-stone dignities of One-Hundred-and-Sixth Street, had given Mrs. Coulter an exquisite tingle. She had pretended that the hint had quite miscarried. She was waiting for another, that she might tingle again.

"I *may* say that I've been thrown among writing persons before now," she told Mrs. Coggeshal, with an expressive side-glance at that lady's husband.

"Yes?" said Mrs. Coggeshal encouragingly.

"Oh, *yes*," continued Mrs. Coulter. "Your grandfather, Clarry—my own late father, as I may say—used to be . . a . . in that line a good deal."

"In that line a good deal" struck her as dreadfully awkward, just as the expression "writing persons" had done. But although "literary" and "literature" were both skulking, so to speak, on the outskirts of her memory, she could not induce them, at this brief notice, to slip inside. She was indeed in temporary doubt as to whether the noun were not "literalogy," or something like that, while vapors of forgetfulness wrapped the adjective altogether.

"You mean that he wrote books?" asked Sadie,

with light thrills of misgiving hurrying electrically through her ; for perhaps something might be said, now, which "papa and Isabel" would think monumentally funny; and Sadie did want things to go off all right just this once.

"No, not *books*," replied Mrs. Coulter. "My father used to write . . ." She paused and looked at Clarry, who colored, and then at Retta, who never dreamed of coloring, and thought that her mother was making a very creditable appearance indeed. "Poetical suffusions," the speaker presently announced. "That was what my father wrote. Gracious! I've known him to knock off a long piece of poetry in just as short a time as it took him to write it down."

"In an album, I suppose," said Coggeshal speculatively.

"Oh, yes — and anywhere! He'd just take a stray scrap of paper and do it as easy as wink. A good many of the ladies in our neighborhood, when we were residing in East Broadway, used to beg my father for pieces of poetry."

"My!" said Mrs. Coggeshal sociably; "what did your mother say to that?"

"Oh, I guess he scribbled off a good many on the sly!" said Mrs. Coulter, and then the two ladies put their heads together for an instant and exchanged a laugh of fathomless congeniality. Mrs. Coulter already felt very intimate with Sadie's mother; she had pronounced her won-



drously unassuming for the wife of a celebrity; she herself would have carried the relationship with a much loftier head.

"I presume you know how fashionable a part of the city East Broadway used to be," she proceeded.

"It's pretty shabby now, ma," smiled Retta, with a timorous inflection.

"Times change things, though," said Clarry, with a venturesome glance at Coggeshal, as if insecure about the solidity of this epigram. But Sadie, who sat next him, swiftly confirmed its excellence by a little commendatory nod.

"We resided there for a number of years," said Mrs. Coulter, whose mother had kept a large boarding-house there, under circumstances of wearing pecuniary drawback. "My father transacted business in a street convenient to it." (This had been Grand Street, and the "business," in which he at last wofully failed, through recurring spasms of intemperance, had been represented by a modest tobacco-shop.) "It was a very tony locality then — oh, *very* tony indeed. Several gentlemen and ladies there kept their carriages and horses. But as my Clarry says, times do change things. I presume I should be real scared if I was to go back there now."

"I'll take you there some day," said Clarry, with the manner of one who feels that a note of gayety is needed to make the talk livelier. "You

might find the old house turned into a liquor-saloon."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Coulter and Retta in concert, with an immediate look from both of them straight at Sadie, as though she would best appreciate this burst of humor on the part of their son and brother.

"I guess ma'd faint away if she was to see *that!*" declared Retta; and Mrs. Coulter expeditiously added: "Our old family-mansion! Clarry, you limb, you! you don't mean it. Gracious! it would be heart-rendering to *me*, I can tell you, after all the happy hours I've spent there!" (She had lived a life of maidenly drudgery, poor harmless romancer, in that East Broadway boarding-house of her dead mother's!)

"Oh, never mind what *he* says," exclaimed Mrs. Coggeshal, reaching for the empty tea-cup of Mrs. Coulter. And then in a whisper: "We know his funning ways by this time, don't we?"

Mrs. Coulter became radiant with mirth, and nodded again and again toward her hostess. "It's *in* him to be comical, you know; he can't help it; his father used to be just the same." Then she gave a look of tentative raillery toward Mr. Coggeshal, and at once re-addressed his wife. "But it don't seem right when *he's* here, does it?"

"Oh, he can take a joke as well as anybody," said Mrs. Coggeshal, with another very intimate nod as she poured out the tea.

"*Can* he?" queried Mrs. Coulter, in a murmur. "Oh, he does look so like a gentleman we used to know, a few years ago in Weehawken." Here the murmur grew to a loud tone. "Mr. Ira B. Sangster. You remember, Retta, we spoke of it when we first made Mr. Coggeshal's acquaintance. Oh, you resemble Mr. Sangster *so* much, sir! Haven't we remarked it, Retta?"

"Oh, yes," acquiesced Retta. "About the eyes and forehead, ma, *particu'ly*."

"Mr. Sangster was a widower, sir," said Clarry, experimentally, to Coggeshal, "and we used to think my sister wanted to set her cap for him."

Mrs. Coggeshal and Mrs. Coulter now uttered a scream of sympathetic laughter, in which Sadie and Retta joined, a trifle less vociferously.

"My!" exclaimed Mrs. Coggeshal to Mrs. Coulter, as soon as quiet had come. "I'll have to look out for that girl of yours, won't I?" And then there was more laughter. But Mrs. Coulter was not to be deprived so soon of Ira B. Sangster as an opportunity for making his importance transpire in the light of a previous notable acquaintance. She dilated on the subject of his having been an alderman, a common-councilman, or some one of that magisterial quality, with as much vehemence as though she were stating that he had been a prince of the blood. She rapidly wove such a nimbus of repute and distinction about Mr. Ira B. Sangster that his not being known by

everybody at table besides herself and her children took the shape of a most regretted fact. In the minds of almost all who had ever come across him, Mr. Ira B. Sangster had been held commonplace and a nobody. But Mrs. Coulter required him, so to speak, as an aristocratic memory, a majestic association of the past — and that was quite enough. Presto! his pedestal was ready, and he took his place upon it.

“He was such a beautiful converser,” she declared, while Mrs. Coggeshal listened with long, slow, complaisant dippings of the head, having discovered that no other of her tea-drinkers whose cup was “out” would care to replenish it. “He could talk politics so as a child could understand him, and in the most elegant *language*! Why, I’ve known summer evenings when our front stoop, there at Weehawken, was just crowded with neighbors — those I allowed myself to be on calling-terms with, you understand — all listening to Ira B. Sangster hold forth. Retta and Clarry, will you ever forget the night we heard that Garfield had been shot? Of course all Weehawken was topsy-turvy with excitement. Ira B. came out and stood on his piazza-steps. They’d asked him to express his sentiments about the assassination. Well, he just threw his head back, and put one hand into the breast of his coat — like pictures you’ve seen of Daniel Webster — and then the language just rolled out! Ret, do you re-

member that sentence about the tears that must have dropped from the angels round Gawd's throne when the craven blow was struck? No, that wasn't it, either. How *did* it go?"

"It went kind of like that," said Retta. "It was too lovely for anything."

"Clarry," appealed his mother, with a little flush in both cheeks, because they were letting her talk, letting her exploit herself, letting her show them how much she liked "society" and how she could hold her own there as well as the next — "Clarry, *you* remember, don't you? . . . Oh, sakes! He hasn't heard a word I've been saying! He and Sadie, there, have been whispering their pretty things together, haven't they?" — with a sudden mirthful swerve toward Mrs. Coggeshal: "*Well*, I guess we behaved just as bad to our elders in our *day*, on'y we won't acknowledge it now. Ain't I right, think?"

"Yes, indeed," said the ever-sympathetic Mrs. Coggeshal. "Young folks will be young, won't they?"

Isabel wondered if her father were not secretly chafing under all this. For her own part she would not have done so in a less perplexed and preoccupied state of mind. Retta Coulter had of course wronged her in having pronounced her even slightly arrogant. She was enough aloof from Mrs. Coulter's mode of thought, action and speech to see the humorous side of all three, but

on this account her humanity, her fellowship, her feminine comprehension of how much true nature underlay such foibles and educational shortcomings, had not suffered the least abatement. The Coulter ladies would have been amazed indeed if they could have read her reflections just then, for she was almost morbidly telling herself what a rude blow would be dealt their pride in this marriage of Clarry and Sadie, if some ugly scandal were really at the root of her father's intimacy with that man, Carolan!

She felt a great relief when the luncheon was over. It seemed to her that her father must inevitably have felt the same. She managed to follow him quite naturally out upon the porch as soon as she saw him go there, while the others made a little circle together in the front parlor. He was standing with his hands behind him and his gaze fixed on the fresh, green view of country beyond. She had drawn close to his side before he knew of her presence.

"Mrs. Coulter's very funny, isn't she, papa?"

"Oh, yes," he said.

"You might make a study of her for one of your stories. I wondered, once or twice, whether she would strike you in that way."

"N . . no," he said. That was all, and Isabel cast a furtive, almost a piteous look at his half-averted face. The pause grew, and as it grew she thought of twenty commonplace things that she



might say to break it. And at last she ventured, quite abruptly, but with a good deal of tenderness:

“Papa, you’re not angry with me, are you?”

“Oh, no, Isabel,” he replied, not turning to look at her, and with a tone that she thought both weary and haughty.

“I was wrong to speak as I did,” she went on, with gentle penitence. “Forgive me. But you surprised me so. You know why. I—I didn’t think, papa, that you *could* . . .” (she hesitated a little, and then got the words out, though with a strong inward aversion for them) “care to have me ever marry *him*.”

He turned to her then. She knew him so well that she saw trouble of spirit in the look which he was trying to make free from the least betrayal of it.

“How could I know, myself,” he said, in a much softer voice, and with a sudden lifting of his shoulders and both his hands, — “how could I know, myself, Belle, *what* my feelings on the subject would be, until the subject, so to speak, was presented?”

She bit her lip, but stealthily. “I see, papa.” She was sure that he now gave a rapid look down into her face, though she had drooped her eyes.

“Perhaps the whole idea may startle *you* less,” she heard him say, “when you’ve grown more used to it.”

"She felt how much she was playing a part, then, and in her native sincerity hated herself for playing it, as she slowly answered:

"Well, I don't know. I—I was a great deal startled at first. You must have seen that."

"I did," he said, using an eagerness that made her heart beat with quickened suspicion of some unguessed motive in him for just those words and just that new, conciliating voice. "But I couldn't help being sure, Belle, that there . . . there was nobody else, child." She remained impassive, and he reached out his hand, taking hers. "If there *had* been anyone else I was almost certain that I must have known it."

She felt like tearing her hand away from his. He pleaded for Carolan in this fashion — *he!* And for *Carolan!* When she had called the man 'his friend' in almost jocular contempt, he had never even upbraided her for it. He had let it pass, as a bit of natural pleasantry. There had been the silent concession between them that here was a character made up of three parts vapor to one of substance, three parts brass to one of gold. If this father of hers had not despised him outright it was because he had forgotten to treat him with any such weighty sort of animadversion. He had merely regarded him from a good steep height of superiority. If he had asked for her hand in marriage then, how disdain would have struggled with astonishment in the answer given him! And

now he had lately won her father for his very advocate!

"There has never been any one else, papa," said Isabel, letting him keep her hand. "Of course you must know that."

He played with her fingers for a few minutes. His hands were feverishly hot. There was something positively supplicating—she might even have called it wheedling, were he another—about the way in which he now said:

"Then why don't you make up your mind, my dear, to . . . to ponder this question fairly and without prejudice? I must tell you that I think simple justice requires you to take such a course . . . And as for what you said this morning—" He broke into a laugh so full of odd tremors and quavers, here, that Isabel could at first hardly credit it as his own; and then he dropped her hand, doing so with an assumption of good-natured repulse entirely unlike him. "You know, of course, what I mean," he hurried on. "About my being in—in Carolan's power. That *you couldn't* have meant. You—you must have said it, my dear, in the most stupidly random way. Come, now, confess that you did!"

"I did, papa," she allowed.

It was a falsehood; but when she noted the alacrity with which he stooped and put his lips to her cheek—as if in grateful recognition of her laconic amends—it did not seem at all the kind

of falsehood for which conscience must reserve any future scourge.

‘He says he told that man to plead his own suit,’ was now speeding through Isabel’s thoughts. ‘I mean to let him!’

## X.

BROCKHOLST kept his resolve, that evening. He called, and was shown into the little front parlor, where Coggeshal was seated beside the low light, seeming as if he read from a magazine, and Isabel was pretending to hear respectfully the rather fulsome panegyrics which both Sadie and her mother delivered upon Mrs. Coulter and Lauretta. It amused Isabel to remark the challenge toward herself in her mother's and Sadie's tones. The domestic air was evidently pulsating with mild prophecies of rebellion. It had been taken for granted, past doubt, that Isabel would have some decidedly opposite attitude to assume, or at least some distinct little vantage-ground of adverse opinion. She felt even more amused, after a while, to observe the curious effect of disappointment created by her own reticence.

'Am I so hard a critic?' the girl asked herself, as the small purling current of eulogy flowed on. And a sort of pang assailed her as she presently thought of how, at a moment when her vicious contradictory tendencies were in better working-order, she might have flatly refused to

hear either Mrs. Coulter or Laretta so beautifully rhapsodized over.

"Belle, of course," Mrs. Coggeshal had at last said, with a direct attack upon the masked foe, "*may* think that neither of them is just up to what *she* calls the right style."

"Right style?" murmured Sadie, with a provocative meekness entirely her own. She concealed a yawn. She was tired, and sat in one of her most reposeful postures against the cushioned end of a sofa. The exigencies of the luncheon, with Clarry there to whisper at incidentally and a great deal of Clarry for the interchange of adoring remarks afterward, had made demands upon Sadie's never too vigorous nervous forces. But she was none the less prepared for a skirmish with Isabel. "Why, what *do* you mean, mamma," she added lazily, "by 'right style'? I'm sure Belle hasn't said any thing like that. I don't see why she should."

"Neither do I," laughed Isabel, brightening with a sudden vivacity which she really felt in no mood to exhibit. "But upon my word, you both of you act as if you had some sort of guilty feeling about my having held my tongue."

"Guilty feeling?" repeated Sadie, in a sluggishly affronted way, straightening herself a little on the sofa and giving Isabel a full, serious look. "*Dear!* Why *guilty*, Belle, I should like to know?"



Isabel laughed again. The little war was about to begin. She never waged battle underhandedly, and both Sadie and her mother knew it — as she was very well aware that they knew it. If they wanted to get her opinion of the Coulters for the purpose of arguing against it, she was perfectly willing to meet them both fairly and stoutly, as was her habit always to meet everybody. She had a number of good things which she could honestly say of Clarry's kinswomen, and a few unfavorable ones which she could as honestly give utterance to. And since she had too apparently been teased, in this covert and left-handed way, for the expression of a judgment, she determined to air one that would be as little wounding to Sadie as the bounds of candid veracity should permit.

"Now you both know perfectly well," she began, "that you're vexed because I haven't come out and said precisely what I think. And you both feel irritated with me because you construe my silence into censure of the Coulters. But that's thoroughly unfair of you, Sadie, and of you, mamma, as well. I *don't* like some things about them. For instance —"

But the battle (if such it would indeed have proved, and if the word be not ill-chosen where two such loving contestants as Isabel and her mother represented opposite sides) was destined not to occur on that evening at least.

For just then a sound of steps plainly could be heard on the near porch, beyond the light summer blind-doors ; and immediately afterward there came that wildly loud peal which a door-bell gives when pulled at night in a still country-house.

It proved to be Brockholst. For a good half-hour after his appearance Isabel was secretly impatient and annoyed. Sadie, who would probably not have done much talking under any circumstances whatever, now showed her fatigue by an almost dead silence, and a series of stares which began at the visitor's head and riveted themselves on various parts of his figure and costume until they had reached the terminus of his boots. These stares aggravated Isabel ; they were so exhaustive yet so coolly and unconsciously imperious ; and meanwhile (as she was almost prepared to state on oath) they were all the consequence of an ardent comparative tendency which became more and more gratified in its discovery how totally the charms of Clarry eclipsed those of Brockholst. Clarry Coulter and Lloyd Brockholst ! What a chasm of difference yawned for Isabel between the two personalities conjured up by these two names ! And that Sadie should be dull enough not to properly recognize this difference, sitting there with so much unconcealed observation in her sleepy velvet eyes, and so much indolent security about her *sans gêne* pose, affected Isabel as an irritating piece of bigotry. Her mother had

never been at all socially assertive; she generally required to be drawn out and made much over, just as Mrs. Coulter had acted toward her that same day. If you liked her she invariably liked you in return, but failing to find that you especially sought her company—she let her entire individuality melt into a domestic background against which the three figures of her husband and her daughters rose with separate phases of distinctness.

Isabel now felt really thankful when both Sadie and her mother had passed from the room, leaving after them that lurking uncertainty as to whether they would return immediately, presently, or not at all, which is perhaps the most decorous manner of bidding a premature good-night.

She had seen that Brockholst had already roused her father's interest, but she somehow wanted him to rouse it still more, and doubted if he would be enabled to do so while two members of their little company preserved a silence which might be interpreted uncongenially by so complete a stranger. Mere habit formed the chief incentive of Isabel; she had never in her life met and liked anyone whom she had not speedily wanted her father to meet and like as well. 'What would papa say?—what would he think?' had always crept into her mind on such occasions. She had meant, on entering his study that morning, to tell him a great deal about her new acquaintance, but the conversation,

as we know, had taken quite another turn — one, indeed, whose painful astonishment still hauntingly dwelt with her, as it is needless to record. A very little while after her mother's quiet withdrawal had followed that of Sadie, Isabel said, with a look toward their guest while she addressed her father:

“Mr. Brockholst has some very original views on the subject of critics, papa, which I hope he will give you the benefit of.”

“I shall be very glad to hear them,” said Coggeshal, who had begun rather rapidly to make up his mind that here was a gentleman with perhaps original views on more than a single subject.

But Brockholst laughingly shook his head. “No, Mr. Coggeshal,” he declared, “I won't repeat my theory of extermination. Since talking with your daughter I have read one of your books — or nearly read it — and it has convinced me that the existence of critics must be a matter of strong artistic indifference to you.”

“One of papa's books?” murmured Isabel. Her face quickly glowed with pleasure. There was no mistaking this compliment. And she did not at all realize how Brockholst, though yet only the acquaintance of a few hours' duration, had managed to make his opinion for good or ill something of note and moment in her own estimate.

“To which of my books do you refer?” Coggeshal asked; and his query, if not unduly sharp,

had a slight jar in its tones of abruptness and constraint.

Brockholst named one of the novels which Carolan had loaned him.

"Ah," Coggeshal said, seeming to brighten. He leaned forward, with a soft flash of awakened satisfaction in his weary eyes, whose resemblance to Isabel's their present observer had already noticed — outside of the weariness and a certain occasional uneasy droop as well. "And did you really like that story?"

"I liked it greatly," Brockholst replied. "Many of its scenes are strongly touched." He spoke with that sincerity which carries its own gentle defiance against distrust; his hearer, as he proceeded, felt that his words would never have been uttered at all unless an honest admiration had formed the sole spur to their delightful frankness. "The book pleased me by its nice repose, and its freedom from all uneven forces in its narrative development. Thus far (and I am almost at the third chapter from the end, if I don't mistake) it seems rather to grow so than to be written so. It has all the care that good literary things have, without any of the finical over-elaboration that acts disguisingly on a number of poor things. There is no great storm, no turbid upheaval of human deeps, no profound agony — and yet I suppose I mention the absence of these points because it strikes me as a book where they might have

been brought in — that is, if you had been a writer who wanted to create effects like that — to *empoigner* your public by creating them — to *prendre les choses au tragique*, as it were. But I should say that you did not want to do it, and I therefore like the story better on this account. Quietude in letters as in life (and of course life and letters should be correlative) always affects me more than tempestuousness, no matter how well the last is done. They have had some people in France who have done it wonderfully well. But it always verges so dangerously on hysteria. Perhaps I've fed too much on French novels, however," Brockholst concluded, with a smile. "They're apt, in the end — even the masterpieces, I fancy — to go wrong with a foreign digestion."

Coggeshal had listened attentively to all this, and with changes of expression on his face which were keenly welcomed by Isabel. She loved him so fondly that it charmed her to see him so taken out of himself — out of his latter, recent self — and made to look just like the man of a few gloomy weeks ago. Nothing, since the beginning of that doleful change, had so warmed him, so vivified him, before. She heard with throbs of joy the hearty, exclamatory sound of his dear, familiar voice, as he now answered Brockholst:

"Yes — yes; I can understand your feeling. I believe the true secret of art in the story-teller is repose — repose and self-control. But passion,



imagination — both held well in leash — must be with him too. He must no more be ordinary than he must be theatrical; he can't afford to be either. The great naturalists and realists of to-day don't understand that it's their high peaks of truth that make them such remarkable reading, and not their valleys of fact. Such men as Zola and Daudet, and even two or three strong American story-tellers whom I could name, are forever pointing to their low slopes and their table-lands. I admit that the pretty play of light and shade is there, but *they* don't seem to admit that they've really put in the snow-crowned summits as well. . *I* think they have, in many cases; *I* see them, if they don't, and if their critics don't. . Now, I'm not a realist. Perhaps I studied my art a little too early (for an American) to catch that fever. But I have always tried to get the broad strokes in with the delicate and the dainty ones." Coggeshal paused for a moment, here, and his eyes wandered excitedly round the room, seeing nothing, it may have been — not even seeing Isabel's face, though she nodded and smiled to him. "I don't say that I've *done* it," he went on eagerly, letting his look rest full, once more, upon Brockholst; "but I've tried. And I should be sorry to think I had completely failed." He sank back in his chair, with a long, soft exhalation of the breath. "That book you've spoken of is my best — my very best. I sometimes think I shall never do any thing even as good as that again."

"It isn't by any means a high-tide mark to be ashamed of," said Brockholst, who had found himself stirred and diverted by what he had just heard, and yet who had already deplored his own critical survey as quite too candid for a member of the traditional *genus irritabile*.

"You're very kind to tell me that," replied Coggeshal, with an ingenuous accent that made his visitor feel what stabs of compunction he would have undergone if his praise had been only polite artifice. "Or, no, perhaps I should not call it kind; for if I thought it nothing more I should put a light enough value upon it. You spoke of critics, I believe" . . .

"Oh, no," broke in Isabel, laughing, "I spoke of them, papa." She did not want to be wrapped in too dense a mantle of silence; she thought it best to make one's self heard, now and then, if one could do this without detriment to the nice harmonious intercourse by which her father's clouded spirits appeared to be so brightly profiting.

"I care nothing for the passing comment of the newspaper critic," Coggeshal declared. "Not that I at all despise his opinion; I am very far from doing so; I have known instances where it has been shrewd, penetrative, and in its way even wise. But it is of the time, the hour; it concerns itself with the fashion, the vogue, that is now uppermost. I have no regard at all for such aims. If I were going to the North Pole I would not drop in at a

modish tailor's and order a great-coat. And that is how it has always been with me, in literature ; I have always been going to the North Pole — or the South, or somewhere like that." His figure had again straightened itself ; he sat erect in his chair ; Brockholst remarked with admiration his blue, lucid, enkindled eye. "Pray don't think I have ever despised form in my work. Without symmetry nothing permanent can be accomplished. But I have striven to make this constantly a secondary trait of my writings. It has often seemed to me only a little beyond the very material necessities of one's craft — the pen, the ink and the paper. Far beyond it, in turn, has stood the desire to give a bold, secure impression of life. I have no sympathy with those men who set the phrase, the treatment, above the idea. What I have always put uppermost is the idea. I never yet wrote a novel which I did not feel impelled to write. Some human problem has appealed to me, and I have sought either to solve it or to hint at its ultimate chances of solution. A mere story — let the popular fictionist tell that, if he will. I've no wish to seem as if I were under-rating the skill requisite for such performance. But the grassy little pathway where the sheep-bell tinkles isn't the cliff where the eagle lights. Life may be an unfathomable ocean, but the operation of dropping plummits into it attracts me all the more on that account. Alas ! there are no doubt a good many

people who consider my books leaden enough to make admirable plummets."

"Papa!" cried Isabel in gay reprimand. "You mustn't run yourself down so soon after Mr. Brockholst has so handsomely praised you. It sounds highly uncivil to *him*. As a matter of hospitality you should now pay yourself only marked compliments." Just during the past few minutes he had grown so like the parent of old that she found herself dropping back into a jocose manner with him which not long ago had fitted their intercourse neatly and flexibly, but which had of late seemed out of keeping as a last year's garment on some shrivelled form.

"Oh, I feel satisfied that your father's method of work is both a liberal and laudable one," said Brockholst. "As far as I can judge from my limited experience of the existent American ideals in literature, I should be inclined to think that a rather hot war is now waged between realism and romanticism. And I suppose that the truth lies mid-way for both contestants, as it so often does in all questions where angry sides are taken."

He said this carelessly enough; he knew that it was a somewhat irrelevant answer to Coggeshal's late bit of rather striking egotism. But the man interested him, and he wanted to put a little vagueness into his answer for that reason. The vagueness might draw Coggeshal out still further. Brockholst himself had once been concerned with

these questions of how to write a story best or worst. But that indolence which so nimbly waits on wealth and so swiftly breeds artistic indifference with all except the few rare legitimate sons of the Muses, had effectually deadened his activities years ago. They had never been deep or sustained ones. He had written his "Marian Moore" with the empirical languor of a really able and gifted intelligence which half doubted and half trusted its own capacity. After finishing it he had proved something to himself, or disproved it; he had not had the final commercial energy necessary to decide just which it was, through the practical medium of publication. And besides, he had put something into the tale — a chronicle of personal sorrow, of past or passing agony, in fact — which had made it seem almost like a vulgarity to let the manuscript see print at all, even if it were worthy of such publicity. Latterly he had skimmed over a sufficient number of the American newspapers in Paris to discover that certain novel-writers were being loudly denounced and as loudly discouraged for the abandonment of old "thrilling" or even "moving" technical traditions; that they were making their books out of life as they saw it and not out of life as dream and fancy distorted it, however picturesquely and winsomely. In his adopted France the whole discussion had become rather old to him. It had been waged so hotly

there that this American fervor wore a lack-lustre pallor beside it. But after crossing the ocean he had found curiosity quicken. It was exceedingly pleasant to meet a fellow countryman like Coggeshal, who could speak on the question from a standpoint of such close creative intimacy with its nicest concerns. He wanted Coggeshal to talk a great deal more than he had yet done. Isabel's little interruptions were also very agreeable to him. He was not sure that he would be enjoying his evening half so much if she were not there, with her faintly lambent gray eyes and her fresh, frank smile.

Coggeshal had leaned back in his chair again, and had ruminatively joined the fingers of both lifted hands together at their tips. Isabel secretly rejoiced in the gesture; she knew it so well; he had so often made it in their old absorbing talks together!

"I have watched the contest of which you speak," Coggeshal said, in the tone of one who enjoys the reflection to which he gives utterance. "I have watched it with keenest interest. And I believe that the surrender will in the end come from the side of the so-called naturalists in fiction."

He paused, and Isabel, wishing to stimulate him into a little more of his former enthusiasm, and feeling that the thread of his discursive talk had been snapped by Brockholst's too general



and indirect words, here broke in, lightly and briskly :

"Oh, papa, you're sometimes a naturalist, too ! I read in some magazine, the other day, that realism imbued the very air of this age and that none of our best novelists could help breathing it in. And when I think of one book you wrote, I can't but feel like endorsing this creed."

Coggeshal gave an abrupt start and looked sharply at her. "Which book?" he asked.

Isabel started, also, now; for such an unexpected change had swept over his whole demeanor.

"Why, 'Rachel Rand,'" she returned, at first almost faltering the answer, because a swift dread had assailed her lest the change might somehow be one which would strike darkeningly upon his new, sunnier mood. "Of course, papa, there's a great difference between that and your other stories; you know this better than I can tell you." Poor Isabel had seen from her father's face that matters had somehow been wretchedly mismanaged by her; and yet she went desperately on, in the forlorn hope of once again bettering them. "Of course," she continued, "I've never heard you say just how or why you did come to write 'Rachel Rand;' but I suspect you may have done it with the idea of proving to yourself, papa, that this modern realism wasn't outside of your powers, and that—"

"My dear child," now came Coggeshal's inter-

ruption, curtly and impatiently spoken, "you are in great error if you think that book anything of the sort. There isn't the first principle of realism about it. If done to demonstrate a single inventive tendency, it was done to — to show the extraordinary influence which attitudinizing and 'gush' may exert over the reading-masses." Coggeshal now turned to Brockholst; the sweet bells of his former mood were indeed jangled; a latent acerbity had replaced his cordial flush and glow; instead of the hearty expansiveness which had so lately belonged to his manner, he now indicated a reserve equally pronounced; you might have said that something acid, mordant or caustic had suddenly entered the sweet waters of a most amiable spirit, to leave them curdled, beclouded, fermented. "I draw a sharp line between that book and all my others," he continued, addressing Brockholst. "I am annoyed at my daughter having mentioned it in your hearing. Her doing so exhibits, I fear, a lack of delicacy — of taste — of true kindness. I —"

"Papa!" broke in Isabel, astonished and wounded. "How can you speak like that!" Already her eyes were glistening moistly, her lips were trembling. "And why should I *not* mention a book which has been preferred by thousands for the tenderness, the truth — yes, even for the help they found in it!"

It amazed Brockholst to observe the mixture

of haughtiness and bitterness with which Isabel's father received these words. He rose from his chair while regarding her with a cold smile of exasperation and rebuke. "If you are unable to give my better books even your lukewarm praise," he said, "I must endure that calamity with as much stoicism as I can muster. But I shall beg you, nevertheless, Isabel, to spare an inferior book the ridiculous fate of being over-lauded. And you, Mr. Brockholst," he went on, after a brief pause, during which Isabel stared at him in a kind of wild, hurt wonder;—"pray oblige me by not ever thinking again of the book thus heedlessly referred to."

He went to the lamplit table and with trembling fingers disordered a little pile of newspapers and pamphlets there. He broke into a nervous laugh while he did this, abruptly veering round and fronting his guest a moment afterward. "It's dispiriting, discouraging, you know, to be brought down from one's high horse — one's Pegasus — by a commonplace rebuff." His manner was fluttered, and his words were almost stammeringly given, now. He appeared to be sensible, for the first time since this unhappy manifestation of ill-timed annoyance, how cold a pall of awkwardness he had spread over their whole little social trio. The harsh note had gone from his voice; he looked embarrassed, even abashed. Before he could speak again Isabel had sprung from her chair and hurried up to him.

"Papa!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Forgive me if I said any thing to displease you! Why, you can't believe that I meant to do it!"

He took her in his arms and kissed her forehead. "My dear," he murmured, with extreme unsteadiness, "it's I who have been wrong — only I! Forgive *me*!" Then he at once released Isabel. He next spoke to Brockholst, yet so swiftly and so agitatedly that the latter could catch but one or two short and very fragmentary sentences, in which lay the admission of a foolish proneness to take offence and the regret for weakened and overstrained nerves. Brockholst, as it seemed, had hardly heard his flurriedly muttered "good-night" before being also aware that he had glided from the room.

Isabel sank into her seat, a minute afterward, with a heavy and prolonged sigh. "Poor papa!" she said, under her breath. Her companion saw that she was pale and distressed; the apologetic earnestness that immediately followed in her tones touched him by its quiet simplicity of pathos. "He would never have acted that way if he had been himself — if he had been well. His health is failing — I have watched him for some time past. It's his nature to be the soul of kindness — and especially toward me, in everything. . . You noticed, though, how quickly he grew sorry, and — and came to his right senses, as it were?"

"Yes," Brockholst said; and I noticed more,

Miss Coggeshal, if you will let me tell you so:—your decidedly lovely tolerance in dealing with him.”

“Tolerance?” she repeated. “With papa? Oh, you don’t know how easy that must always come to me.” This little spontaneous expression of her love, so slight and yet so richly suggestive, charmed him.

‘And they often sneer, over in Europe,’ he thought, ‘at the relations between American daughters and their parents!’ “Your father is unstrung, debilitated,” he said aloud. “Have you asked him to see a physician yet, or does he see one who has failed to benefit him?”

Isabel shook her head. “He insists that there is no real trouble,” she sighed; and then, as her thoughts flew toward the subject of her new evil prophecies, a most melancholy look crossed her face. . .

But before very long Brockholst had dispelled the look. All tact of the consoler’s office came readily to him in this instance, for it was chiefly shown by securing the attention of his auditor as regarded topics of a more cheerful kind, and Isabel, liking him as she already did, let the current of his talk soon drift her into brighter air. . .

This became the first of a series of meetings between Isabel and himself, as a month slipped placidly onward. It was at least a serene month

for Brockholst; he remained unconscious of any serious disturbance threatening to succeed it.

For all that he knew, events at High Bridge were working themselves out with the most idyllic sort of monotony. He had thought of getting away, that summer, to Long Branch, to Saratoga, perhaps even to the still more remote region of Newport, since his uncle's health continued unmenaced by any fatal lapse, and a telegram could do such marvels in the way of prompt future summons. But he had somehow contented himself very adequately, after all, here in his present suburban quarters. At first his conferences with Isabel were separated by intervals which gave him full chance for reflection as to how grateful or the opposite it would seem if they could be materially lessened. He was a man who had seen many differing types of womanhood under conditions both nutritive and imperilling to their best instincts. He had even passed through several sinister stages of misogyny, from the bovine quality of cynicism which made some Frenchman call woman *la femelle de l'homme* to a contempt which dealt in far daintier ironies of aspersion. There had really been an excuse with him for much of this nonsensical playing at life. The jilt whose guile was a poison acrid enough to have stilled a feebler heart for all time, had made his throb on in a sick way through many dreary months, with brain and vision to suffer from its fitfulness. Then had



come resuscitation, rehabilitation, health. He had seen not a few women, since his convalescence, who pleased him, and he would have had the most gloomy feelings, no doubt, regarding the reality and permanence of his recovery if none of these had been able to do more. But not one had possessed just the same blending of mental and personal graces, he had come slowly to tell himself, as that which he found in Isabel. The attributes which he most respected in woman, and those which he held most luring and lovable without its being a matter of respecting them or otherwise, appeared correspondingly hers. When her little charities transpired, he had felt a suspicious thrill and an immediate retrospective impulse, for both of which he had soon cordially hated himself. And yet he had basely asked his own thoughts what bit of sentiment he could have let fall which might have induced her to show him this glimpse into her moral and duteous young soul. But he applied a stout scourge of self-reprimand, soon afterward, for what he denounced within his own heart as a most ignoble piece of misanthropy. Isabel was of flawless honesty; her visits to the poor and the suffering were neither concealed nor avowed. They had come to her new friend's knowledge in the natural deepening and widening of acquaintanceship. The trouble, as Brockholst soon declared to his own heart, was with himself entirely, and never with Isabel. Her sweet, maid-

only sincerity guarded her against one evil ray of his own worldliness. If she had known what sometimes came so balefully creeping across the benign satisfaction which he had begun to take in her company, she would almost certainly have recoiled with shame and pain. And it was precisely such ascetic visitations as these which made Brockholst occasionally fear lest, after all, those lurid and crucial weeks in Paris had not somehow left him spiritually maimed. But by degrees he found it impossible to look into Isabel's eyes, as he and she sat or walked together, without fiercely reproaching himself for his own frigid views. He had lived so much in the gross, big world, he had heard so much, by whisper or by open speech, of his fine eligibility as a marrying bachelor, worth thousands a year (the trumpeters of gossip always made it many thousands more than fact allowed), that he was prepared for untold matrimonial approaches. All these feelings now became, in the lapse of days, repellent to Brockholst. He soon found it difficult to conceive of Isabel except as wholly exempt from any but the most natural and wholesome influences.

His remembrance of being a "catch," a *parti*, with his fifteen thousand a year and his unimpaired good-looks, became for him an association of his foreign days alone. Over there the girls were always regarding marriage commercially — or their mothers and fathers were doing it for

them. Here he began to see that it might be refreshingly different. And Isabel helped him to believe so, with her wise and sweet ardors, her feminine yet assertive opinions. Other women had sought him for his security of income and his reputed excellence of transpontine station. But here was a woman who knew nothing and obviously cared nothing about such fortuitous gifts.

Their walks were frequent, through the brakes and dells or along the open roadside of High Bridge. But they often would spend hours in Isabel's home as well. Brockholst had won a palm of popularity there. Mrs. Coggeshal's approval of him had not been at all speedy, and that of Sadie had revealed the protracted indecision peculiar to nearly all important law-making. But her judgment had been finally reached. Isabel's new friend had become always most heartily welcome. On his own side he privately marvelled at the difference between herself and the two other ladies of her household. It was amazing; it was almost unaccountable. She was her father's daughter; he at length reached this explanation of the mystery and stopped there for want of a better one. Coggeshal had meanwhile greatly attracted and engaged him. The man's mind was to Brockholst a surprisingly fresh and subtle object for study, and his fits of gloom and depression awakened a respectful pity in their observer. Perhaps this pity would have been less

keen but for the evident warmth of Isabel's filial attachment. But in any case Coggeshal would have roused his regard and esteem. The author was so deeply in love with his art — so responsive to theories or suggestions concerning it — so eloquent, when the moment proved fairly propitious, in his defences, his arguments, his protestations, his dogmas. Brockholst, who had always liked men of letters, liked this one with an increasing zest.

He had read three more of Coggeshal's novels, and had reached an unflattering conclusion as to the genuine inspiration which they indicated. Every thing seemed to be in them and of them except the sacred fire. That was wanting, and its absence, furtively understood and regretted by the writer of the tales, formed in Brockholst's belief a reason for all the melancholy and spleen which made Coggeshal their victim. If the father of Isabel had been a successful creator — if he had not been clad with the pathos of a lofty ambition wedded to comparatively feeble accomplishment — he would have addressed his new watcher as a far less original and appealing figure. But his insufficiency, his shortcoming, his bold reach and insecure grasp, his valiant aspiration and partial achievement, were a source of incessant curiosity and reflection to Brockholst. In the sure hand that carves a perfect statue from the rugged marble there is monotony of certitude. You become

so confident it will never go wrong that you almost lose concern in the perfection of its craft, and think what a picturesque variety there would be in one loose and nerveless blow of the chisel. Coggeshal's failures made him more interesting than if they had been the admirable reverse. Besides, they were never absolute failures; they were constantly near enough triumph to render them subjects for inquiry, speculation, analysis.

All this time Brockholst had never looked into a copy of "Rachel Rand." His not having done so was one of those purely circumstantial results which for lack of a more cogent definition we name accident. At any hour during this lapse of days he might have come upon the book, taken it up, opened it, and with the precipitate rush and blare of bewildering discovery have known all! But as yet this event had held fire. With Carolan waiting in sharp suspense, with Isabel and her father both equally unconscious (though in different ways) of any such possible calamity, affairs had glided on, exempt from the least perturbing ripple. And yet in the twinkling of an eye the air might blacken with storm. Brockholst stood close to the mere filmy veil that hid from view an atrocious crime, committed against himself. He had only to lift his hand for the whole raw shame to glare at him grossly. But he did not lift his hand. He held much agreeable converse with the man who had dealt him a burn-

ing wrong. He also began slowly to assure himself that he was falling in love with that man's dear and amiable daughter. It was all indeed like the volcano's edge, and yet he remained ignorant of the slightest peril. The tardier melting of some small ice-block, the peculiar lodgement of a few pebbles, may have temporary force to stay an avalanche. What we think of as the unimportance of trifles we not seldom find to be something in its way closely like their majesty.



## XI.

DURING this time Mrs. Bondurant and Brockholst had met again, and more than once again, at the house of the Coggeshals. Her manner to him was coolly self-possessed, though she veiled severe enough pangs of humiliation behind it. He had dealt her an unpardonable wound; and yet of what moment to such as he was her pardon or lack of pardon? She had fallen from her heaven of social eminence; her wings were clipped; she could never rise as of old in that shining air of dominance and distinction. Her sole chance of re-securing even a pale shadow of former glories had lain in the forgiveness of Brockholst and the unperished vitality of his love. This chance had miserably and memorably failed with her, as we know, and in her rageful feelings afterward she had sneered at the very heights to which he could by marriage have raised her. Bah! when she had had her millions of francs oversea among the stately boulevards! How much below all that would have proved her position as his wife! It would have been like Chiselhurst and the condolence of Imperialists to the dethroned Eugenie. But it would

nevertheless have been much beside the bleakness and barrenness of her present lot. And then the Brockholsts were of such excellent old stock ; one would have the appearance of keeping so thoroughly within one's own set if one had become Mrs. Lloyd Brockholst. He used to have about fifteen thousand a year, and that sum would have been quite enough in Paris for them to be *bien installés* upon. The thing could'nt be done here, but there it was different. Nearly all the great people would have taken her up again. They might have been a little *difficiles* at first, but she would have brought them round ; she would have managed all that. And then the small people would have flocked to her ; they always did flock to you again after you had got back among the ruling swells.

But Brockholst had crushed all her hopes pitilessly that one evening. He had been iron. He was a totally changed man. It was hard to realize how a few years could have altered any one so dreadfully for the worse. He had lost every atom of his old fascination — oh, yes ! She would never have cared for him the least in the world if he had been like that when she was Alma Hudsonbank. And she did care for him then, a good deal, until Eugene Bondurant had come between them. But Brockholst was like all men ; wound a man's egotism and he never pardons you. She had not been really more than half culpable — of

course she hadn't! How many hundreds of girls would have acted precisely as she had done! Bondurant had cast a perfect spell over her; it had been like those stories of witchcraft that you read when you are a child. And *she* was such a child! And then Lloyd Brockholst, though nice and loving, never had had a particle of true romance in his nature. He wasn't a man, either, of any gayety, a man with whom *on peut plaisanter*, as it were. And she was a girl so full of spirits that she remembered how she had wanted this trait in him, and missed awfully not having it . . . Oh, there had been so much excuse on her own side! Lots of little reasons for the whole unfortunate rupture of the engagement were coming up to her the more she thought of it. She began to feel really convinced that when everything was considered he had been quite as much in fault as she. Oh, quite!

Following the audacity of these sophistries came just what was to be expected from one of Alma Bondurant's mental and moral calibre. She was besieged by a vengeful and spleenful rancor against Brockholst. He might have taken compassion on her and saved her from uncle Stuyvesant's niggardly charities. It was detestable of him not to let the dead past bury its dead, and the living present transport both of them on a kind of permanent bridal-tour to dear, adorable Paris.

Was he getting to like Isabel Coggeshal? It looked very much as if he were. Mrs. Bondurant, as she found means to watch him now and then while with Isabel and to acquaint herself regarding his attentions and deferences toward Herbert Coggeshal's daughter, soon felt that she was being made the very martyr of destiny. It was not enough that she had fallen on her knees to him, there in her own cottage that evening, and been insultingly repulsed by him afterward. She must now witness, but a stone's-throw away, his pointed devotions to another woman. And he might mean marriage, or discover in a few more weeks that he meant it. Such a thing was quite possible with such a man. He had reached an age when men sometimes behave in just this reckless matrimonial fashion. He was interested in "questions," and all that, and the booky father might lead him adroitly on. He might easily close his eyes to the fact of Isabel's namby-pamby, unrepresentable mother, and her silly, rather common sister. He wouldn't *encanailler* himself by the match, either. Isabel was good form enough, in spite of her ponderous honesty and virtue, and he, with his money and his assured position, could marry very much as he liked.

Secret torments were now convulsing Mrs. Bondurant. She had fully persuaded herself that she was the most wronged and outraged of beings. And just as this mood of mind had become som-

brely and distressingly permanent with her, she was impelled, as if by one of fate's most careless ironies, into a fancy, a doubt, a suspicion, that bewildered and thrilled her.

She had repeatedly taken up "*Rachel Rand*," skimming a page or two here and there and then neglecting to read more. She rarely read anything except the most highly-colored French novels, and even these, when she could procure them nowadays, failed to entertain her. Hers was not the bent of mind which enjoys imaginative effort in others. Her chief craving was for actuality, and she had a private creed that all the embellishments which fiction can possibly produce are nothing more than so much cheap stucco, fit to be peeled off and tossed away wherever it encrusts the goodly solidity of fact. She was more alive to the flimsiest of current gossip than she would have been to some episode by a master story-teller, for she missed the power of realizing that truth may dwell where no tangible event exists. In her festal days of prominence she had been noted for the determination with which she followed the hounds of scandal on their most unmerciful scents, and there were occasions when it would scarcely have been straining metaphor to state that she was indeed in at the death.

This time she began "*Rachel Rand*" with the intention of faithfully reading it through, and hence she began at the beginning. She felt help-

lessly, pitiably idle. It was enough to drive one mad, she told herself, this being so absolutely *désœuvrée*. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of a sultry day, and she had partaken of a solitary though by no means a slender or very digestible lunch. She had gone to lie on her bed soon afterward, according to a recent custom which was one of the results of her present lonely, lazy and almost moping life, and she had taken Mr. Coggeshal's book with her, expecting to fall asleep over it as she had more than once done before now with this and other novels. That morning she had paid a visit at the Coggeshals', and had met Brockholst there for the first time since the little nocturnal bit of drama in her own sitting-room. The conceivability of his marriage with Isabel had just begun to dawn in a wicked, elfish flicker upon her consciousness. She had felt the torpid forces of malice move within her as a serpent might move in its sleep. Isabel had talked a great deal with Brockholst in a lowered voice; they broke into laughter occasionally, and exchanged mirthful or meaning looks. The widow had passed a most intolerable morning. She had given up Mrs. Coggeshal and Sadie in despair. Sadie was to her thinking both vulgar and sluggish — a combination which had points of novelty, it was true, but which nevertheless affected her in its present example as disagreeably as if it had resulted from bouncing and hilarious vivacity.



Mrs. Coggeshal, on the other hand, was simply maudlin; she was one of those complete feminine nonentities for whom clever men would sometimes cast a slur upon the more rational portion of their sex by unexplainably marrying. And then there had been a Mrs. Coulter present, who was *roturière* beyond language, who told you every five minutes that her son was going to marry Sadie (as if it were an event for the *Almanac de Gotha* to chronicle) and who referred to Tomlinson, the clerk in the drug-store, as "*such* a stylish young gentleman!" Mrs. Bondurant had never met so odd a creature as this Mrs. Coulter, or one who perpetually floated in so celestial an atmosphere of made-to-order gentility. But instead of amusing or interesting her, Mrs. Coulter bored her more insupportably than any of the others. Mr. Coggeshal had not appeared; he usually did not appear when she was there. Perhaps he was too clever to appreciate the inanities of his own household; it was quite supposable that he should shrink from them, and not be a great light of wisdom or learning, either. Mrs. Coulter had referred to him as though he were a slowly-developing Shakespeare, and once when she had remarked of him "I dare say he is drowned this very minute in some of his grand thoughts," even the magnificently confident reverence of his brainless wife hadn't prevented her from one of her piping, aggravating "My's!" Oh, it had all been so

immeasurably tedious! It went on the long list of wrongs inflicted by the cruel parsimony of uncle Stuyvesant. But Mrs. Bondurant did not intend that it should be her last visit. Decidedly, no. She had her reasons for intending altogether the opposite.

Her nap to-day has been briefer than usual. She had curled herself within a sort of nest sunk into one side of the yielding bed, and she now opened "Rachel Rand" with a yawn in which there was the least possible anticipation of being diverted. She read the first four or five pages with a wandering heed enough, but presently a new passage sparkled upon her listless intelligence unexpectedly. She read along, after that, for a good many more pages without pausing to pronounce the operation in any way burdensome. By the time that she had reached the fourth chapter she was anxious to acquaint herself with the entire story.

It was a story which had charmed duller and also much brighter minds than hers. It was one of those very rare tales that possess the multiplex characteristic of pleasing thousands in the generation for which they have been written. Its drama was pungent enough for the yearners after a state of tingling nerves; its verisimilitude was sufficiently exact to satisfy those who demand both 'nature' and probability; its grace and punctilio of style were so well removed from slovenly deal-

ing as to propitiate the foes of erratic syntax. It was distinctly literature, and yet it held sources of enjoyment for readers in whom this note of excellence could wake no responsive echo. Mrs. Bon-durant, slight as was her regard for all books, had in abundance the strange gift, half of brain and half of eye, which permits rapid perusal. She was soon following the fortunes of "Rachel Rand" with avidity, and by six o'clock, the hour at which she dined, she had completed the first half of the volume.

During dinner she kept it at her side, occasionally pausing in the meal and referring back to certain scenes or incidents. After dinner she went into her sitting-room, where the summer sunlight was for a good while clear and high enough to allow of her reading without a lamp. But the lamp had been illumined for a considerable time longer when at last she finished "Rachel Rand."

She laid the book on the table beside her. The little house was very still. A single cricket out in the mild summer darkness was chanting dreamily and pleadingly. She sat with drooped head in the small, quiet room. She was thinking of the story, and of the reminiscences it had vivified to her. She had never before had an experience at all resembling this one with "Rachel Rand." Even the books which had given her pleasure had almost never left behind them the least impres-

sion of reality, of having borrowed their life from the red-veined life of breathing men and women. But now it seemed to her as if these lately-scanned leaves were each of more than photographic import — as if they had been literally steeped in both the fleshly and spiritual vitality of the lovers whose history they told!

And who were those lovers? Did not she, Alma Hudsonbank Bondurant, know them both? It was not just what they were that pierced her with a sense of similitude; it was what they *did*. Where could this or that record of happening have been taken from if not from one of two experiences? The whole affair began to address her in such confusing colors that she was prepared to grant some ghostcraft as its origin. A shudder crept through her frame as she made this concession to the powers of darkness, for those were mysteries with her which, like the powers of light, she had never done more than formlessly doubt. During a few moments, in which she had quitted her chair and begun to wander from object to object about the limited room, a touch of positive terror had laid itself coldly upon her sensibilities, and she had asked of her thoughts if this man, Herbert Coggeshal, could have used some satanically clairvoyant means for arriving at the marvellous knowledge he had shown. Fear ran hurrying after fear, and her cheek grew white, while the little chamber seemed never so deadly still as now,

nor the darkness out of doors, where that one cricket was droning its eerie song, so repellingly dismal. She thought of ringing for the servant below stairs; she dreaded an exposure of hysteric outburst before that coarse and unsympathetic Joanna, with whom she had always thus far been the incarnation of reticence and reserve; and yet to remain alone like this, with such portentous excitements at work, was becoming swiftly unbearable.

Perhaps the reluctance to summon Joanna exerted a sanely restorative effect. Her head being a little cleared of the folly which threatened to befog it, she saw the absurd side of her horrors and set herself, with increasing strength of control, to sensibly flout them. The whole thing *was* extraordinary — alarmingly so. There were four or five scenes in that book she had just read which detailed exceptional occurrences between two of its people. She had acted in precisely such scenes with Lloyd Brockholst, during her engagement to him. She had deliberately lied to him, once, regarding a bouquet which Bondurant had given her, and his manner of discovering the lie had been identical with that described in Coggeshal's absorbing story. This would not by itself have been an astounding piece of *vraisemblance*. But the ensuing circumstances! — had these ever before been linked together in just the same order since woman was made out of the rib of man?

And then certain minor sayings, doings, modes of detection and evasion, arrangements of skirmish, defence, ambuscade, recrimination, reproach, acknowledgment, defeat, defiance — could mere chance have put all these into the inventive capacity of some one who had never known that they were as true as the sunrise yesterday and the sunset afterward? No, impossible! What, then was the solution of the enigma? Why, that Coggeshal must have heard the whole tale of Alma Hudsonbank's engagement to Lloyd Brockholst. But who had told him this tale? She, Mrs. Bondurant had never repeated it in full to a soul, dead or alive. She had told it in *her* fashion, with prevarication, with self-extenuation, but never as it had been told in "Rachel Rand." And Brockholst — was it not almost incredible that he could or would have made so exhaustive a confidence? He might have written down some such thing in a diary . . . Yes, he might have done that . . . He used to be a kind of scribbler in his way, and he had more than once said to her that he would like at some future time to write a novel. . .

She stopped there, in her reflections, and dropped once again into her vacated chair, with hands knotted together and her forehead in the darkest of puzzled frowns. She felt as if a vague, flitting thread dangled before her, which one fortunate clutch might seize and a thousand others might miss. .



Suddenly it flashed upon her that Brockholst had sailed from Paris to New York after the breaking of his engagement, and had remained there for some time in the society of his uncle, Andreas Chadwick.

Her thoughts worked blindly yet nimbly then, and with those leaps in their speculative progress or recession, with that continued doubling upon, losing and regaining the dim object of their pursuit, which we like (however unwarrantedly) to call the illogical method of feminine intuition. But in a little while Mrs. Bondurant felt as if she might perhaps have caught her dangling thread. She had read a novel of Herbert Coggeshal's weeks before — or rather rushed haphazardly through it, so as to be able to tell her new acquaintance, Isabel, who had made her a present of the copy, that she thought it "oh, so enormously clever." But in reality she had thought it mournfully dull. She hurried, now, to a book-stand in the corner of her sitting-room and found the recollected volume. She set herself to read a chapter or two of it, in search of resemblances. After about a half-hour she flung the book aside. There was not a shadow of evidence that the same hand had written the two books.

But Lloyd Brockholst had only recently arrived at High Bridge. His uncle, however, had not recently arrived there, nor had the secretary, valet, companion, of this uncle — Carolan.

Carolán ! A flood of suspicion entered her mind at the name. Isabel had long ago admitted Carolán's intimacy with her father. Could the novel have been some old manuscript of Brockholst's left years since with his uncle and found by this half-servant of his, now, when Andreas Chadwick was an imbecile of forgetfulness, irresponsibility?

'I am tired thinking,' said Mrs. Bondurant to herself, when it was almost midnight. 'But at least I can go to bed with one definite idea. This Carolán and I must become acquainted with one another as soon as possible.'

She carried out her plan within the next three days. It was not at all difficult. She had won the marked admiration of the druggist's clerk, Mr. Tomlinson, whom Mrs. Coulter had declared to be so stylish. She had allowed this gentleman to prescribe for a rather severe cold caught in the early spring. He would recommend these trochees and that gargle to-day, only that he might deplore their inefficiency and substitute more potent remedies on the morrow. He considered that a chasm of social difference lay between Mrs. Bondurant and himself, and being a young man of remarkably controlled impulses he had paused upon the crater-edge of a passion rather than be precipitated into the molten lava below. He had an exceedingly thin, tall figure, and a pale face as beardless as a maiden's, though there was something quite the reverse of maidenly

about the bony angle of his jaw and the spheric protuberance of his "Adam's-apple." His manners, however, lacked manliness to a striking degree, for his voice had in it few but treble notes, and he was given to effeminate modes of speech and phrasing. His two favorite exclamations were "Don't say!" and "Go along!" The first he was apt to utter in a generally colloquial way, as an incentive to further conversation, a premium of excellence put upon what you had just said, a politely amazed doubt, because of its excessive importance and value, that you or anybody else could possibly have said it; and he not often accompanied it by a little social *tchsh*, made with the tongue against the teeth. He was constantly employing his "Don't say" with Mrs. Bondurant, but he had never yet dared to approach those bounds of intimacy which would authorize the utterance of a "Go along." This expression signified with him, in a major sense, humorous discredit of your veracity; but it had a score or so of minor meanings, whose variations could all be referred to an equality between himself and his interlocutor. There was indeed no such equality in the case of the elegant and dazzling widow, who seemed to him like an exile from one of those groups of ladies in the colored fashion-plates of *Godey's Lady Book*, and who had more than once given him very plainly to understand (even if he had not understood it at a glance) that she

was a bird of very different feather from those which ordinarily flew past his pharmacy.

On the present occasion she had no sooner crossed its threshold than she observed Carolan seated before one of the counters. He was waiting until a prescription had been made up for his employer, Mr. Chadwick; there were several other people also waiting in the shop. Mr. Tomlinson had withdrawn from view, and was compounding something for somebody amid the professional seclusion of rear regions. The moment that Mrs. Bondurant appeared, however, he advanced to meet her, becoming briskly visible and showing that he must have some occult means for observing all that went on during his incidental absences. He at once devoted himself to Mrs. Bondurant, and they spoke in murmurs together. She told him that she felt enormously indebted to him for having cured her cold, and that she considered it would be grossly ungrateful for her not to assure him that he alone *had* cured it. All the while she was giving a sidelong glance at Carolan, who stood not far away and perhaps felt a little wrath of the hot but hidden sort for being thus promised further detention. A stout woman, among the others who waited, now bent on the widow's modish and *svelte* figure something very like a scowl; she was the customer whose turn to be served had now arrived, and of her malaria-ridden husband, she had told Mr. Tomlinson already that "th'

owld man was took putty bad this mornin'." She thought it an injustice that Mrs. Bondurant should thrust others aside, and while this thought crossed her mind there was a look on her puffy, morose visage which might broadly be described as communistic.

But Mr. Tomlinson profusely concerned himself with his new visitor, nevertheless, and now gave a falsetto laugh that was full of modest deprecation. He always drew in his shoulders like an embarrassed school-girl when he laughed, and lifted one hand to his mouth. The latter gesture was due, very probably, to a defective front tooth, for whose partial ruin dentistry had long ago made golden reparation; but here was one of the few cases in human nature where the possession of gold stimulated no pride in him who had acquired it. Meanwhile Mrs. Bondurant quickly changed the subject of gratitude for past favors to a request for some service yet to be performed. It was a very trifling service, though the druggist's clerk received it with a secret pang of jealousy.

"Oh, dear me, yes, certainly I will," he promptly murmured, however, with a momentary sweep of the eyes in Carolan's direction. "And I guess he'll be glad enough, too; for I've got to keep him waiting ever so long. My employer, Mr. Wicks, is always going to the city just when it's our busiest time, and leaving me to 'tend to things all

alone, like as now. Oh, of *course* yes! He'll be delighted, I'm sure. So you'd reely and truly like to make his acquaintance, ma'am? Don't say!"

Carolán was presently introduced, with cumbersome and effusive formality on the part of Mr. Tomlinson and a more settled scowl on that of the stout watching dame, whose wronged soul may now have throbbed under a sense of burning injury. When this event took place he manifested much less delight than the kind of surprise which narrowly misses being discourteous.

He knew just who Mrs. Bondurant was, having learned weeks ago from Coggeshal. He thought her *chic* a mere vulgar smartness, though he had often granted that she sometimes looked the true aristocrat. They had met constantly, as two residents of the same small place will of necessity do. He felt as familiar with her pony-wagon, her befeathered driving-hats, her fashionable patterns of toilette, as he felt with the ever-assertive arches of High Bridge itself. But though he would have liked to become acquainted with her (chiefly because aware that Isabel and she were on good friendly terms) he had always fancied that she regarded him as some one wholly beneath her most passing concern. He had been perfectly right in this feeling, which the widow's air of serene indifference had through continuous transient encounters actively incited. And perhaps Mrs. Bondurant, when she now began to treat him



in her most genial and indulgent way, was fully cognizant of self-wrought prejudices to be overcome.

She overcame them with no difficulty whatever. She had been quite certain that he would readily yield to her bland overtures. And she made them very bland indeed. He was just the sort of fellow who would instantly respond to her *bonne mine* whenever she chose to assume one. She had not had her followers, her dancers-in-attendance during those gay Paris days for nothing. She would turn him into one of these before ten minutes had elapsed. He might not fall in love with her; she entirely hoped that he would not. But he would like her; he would be willing to drop in upon her at the little cottage whenever she wished. And she could bend him afterward to her own uses, giving him his curt *congé* when she had got from him all that she desired to get.

"It really must have struck you as too positively frightful," she was soon saying to him, in well-modulated undertone, "that I should have asked poor Mr. Tomlinson to introduce us. But I have seen you *so* often here, and have heard the Coggeshals all speak of you *so* much, that I fancied you would be mercifully forgiving, don't you know, if only on the plea of mere neighborly sociability."

She looked at him a trifle languishingly, then, with her black eyes, and thought how handsome he was

on a near view and yet what thoroughly bad style. There was something plebeian in the very tying of his cravat. He might be a *commis-voyageur*, or a person who roamed about, "working up" letters for newspapers. How could women like men of this stamp? But they undoubtedly did — and women of the very best form, too. Who could forget that little Comtesse X — at Nice, whose blood was blue as any in Europe, and who ran away with an Irish war-correspondent? He had short curls all over his head, just like this fellow, and his trousers always bulged at the knee, as though they needed ironing.

While Carolan thought Mrs. Bondurant quite as objectional as she thought him — while she seemed for him to literally shed exaggerations as the scales of a fish shed light, and to diffuse them as some unwholesome, gaudy-dyed flowers are forever diffusing musky, oppressive scents, he found himself pleased, notwithstanding, by what, as a journalist, he might have called her *entrée en matière*; and very soon a considerable amount of personal dislike had fled from his bosom. He was amazed to find that this butterfly did not deem him a mere common weed, after all, but was willing to poise above him thus flatteringly.

Although feeling abashed, at first, for the proper words of reply, he had soon cocked the hat of his native gallantry, as might be said, jauntily and characteristically on one side. He assured Mrs.

Bondurant, in his mellow voice and with his blue eye seeming to sparkle the purest sincerity, that it had been a matter of real sorrow to him, this prolonged deprivation of an acquaintanceship in which he had felt so deeply that he would be a fortunate gainer. The widow realized that many of her sex would have thought this charming enough, while to her it all had a second-rate *cachet* about it. But she straightway answered:

“Oh, if that is the case, Mr. Carolan, I do hope we shall be friends. I haven’t any thing at all immense to offer you in the way of hospitality. You have seen my atom of a house; and then at times — toward the ends of the months, you know — I’m often feeling so poor that it’s weird. But I shall be fascinated to have you come, and I’ll try not to make it too horrifyingly stupid. Of course I shall expect to shock you with my lightness — you, *a savant*, an *homme d’esprit*. But one needs a bit of *nougat* or spun-sugar, now and then; one can’t forever live on the heavy solids.”

“Ah, lady,” replied Carolan, with an old-time touch about the politeness of this reply which some hearers would have found nothing short of irresistible, “I fear that you wholly under-rate your own resources both of entertainment and instruction.”

He was inclined to be rather stiffly ceremonious with her during the earlier visits paid at her cottage; but by degrees he settled into a far more familiar manner, which made her like him less

than she had previously done; it was just as if he had exchanged a dingy garment for one still more rusty and shabby. But at the same time she persuaded him that his presence in the cottage was always most valuably welcome — which, indeed, for reasons unallied with any social preferment, it undoubtedly was.

‘He is even cleverer than I thought,’ she told herself, as days glided on. ‘If he knows anything, he will guard it very shrewdly. He is suspicious in the way that people are suspicious who have guilty consciences. Something is on his mind, worrying him stealthily. It isn’t Isabel Coggeshal, either, for he was perfectly *bon camarade*, the other day, about telling me that he adored *her*. What can it be? I must deal with him very carefully; I see that the least mis-step might spoil everything.’

At this same time Carolan sought her company more than half with the desire to dissipate some of his own gnawing anxiety. He watched every movement of Brockholst that it was possible for him to watch. At any hour — any moment, in fact — he expected the unmasking and ruin of Coggeshal, accompanied by the disgrace of his own implication. Incessantly the temptation came to cast the dust of High Bridge forever from his feet, and slip forever from the ken of all who dwelt there.

He would have done this but for a single vetoing cause — Isabel.

## XII.

ALL through these next few weeks the preparations for Sadie's wedding were gathering both momentum and coherence. It was to be a very small wedding, and yet the mere fact of any such event occurring at all in an atmosphere so completely domestic as that of the Coggeshal household, had produced not a few singular perturbations. Isabel would find herself earnestly solicited for advice at one moment, and caustically repulsed the next. A cry of horror went up from Sadie and Mrs. Coggeshal when she suggested that the bride should go to the little church near by in a nice gray travelling-dress, instead of the more conventional white silk one, with veil and orange-flowers. Sadie's look of melancholy scorn dwelt with Isabel for an hour or two afterward.

"Why don't you propose that I shall go off some evening on the sly," Sadie had witheringly retorted, "and meet Clarry near the church, somewhere, and come back as if nothing had happened, like our waitress, Jane, last fall?"

"I do *think*, Belle!" struck in Mrs. Coggeshal before Isabel had time to parry this attack. "Sa-

die isn't a *widow*. I declare you sometimes just *try yourself!*"

"Don't join against me till my guilt is proven, mamma," said Isabel. "I merely meant that every thing is so quiet out here—that's all. A fully-decorated bride, with a trail, will affect our modest neighborhood almost as violently as a comet might."

She afterward repented of her suggestion, and especially as Sadie was amiably infuriated on account of it for some time afterward, never communicating with her except in monosyllables full of patient resignation, and even passing her the butter at breakfast with a bereaved air. But there were other reasons why Isabel's conscience smote her, and why she soon made Sadie the most direct and humble apology, putting both arms about her sister's neck and giving her a conciliatory kiss which was apathetically received. "Why, I never dreamed of being angry, Belle," Sadie had answered, with torpid satire; and "Oh, yes, you were," Isabel had asserted, giving her another final kiss, "but it's all right between us now, dear, I *do* hope!" Privately to her own thoughts Isabel had declared that she had acted with a most inconsiderate want of feeling. Of course Sadie desired to wear the accepted bridal garments; what young bride did not desire to wear them? It was a very just and sweet little budding of sentiment, which she had met in a ruthless and frosty manner. With the thought of her father's



hidden trouble now continually vexing her, and with the harassment of deciding just how it would be best to begin her new course of action toward Carolan, she had let herself slip into a culpably indifferent state as regarded Sadie's great coming happiness. And Sadie's happiness was *so* dear to her! Nothing except that of her father and mother could be dearer! It was one thing to disapprove of Sadie's "way", and often even to mentally groan under its inflictions; it was another not to cherish for her sister the most loyal and inalienable fondness!

As regarded Carolan, Isabel grew daily more perplexed and disheartened. She wanted greatly to meet him; she had made up her mind that she would employ the surest tact and cunning as soon as they came face to face. She had already seen him walk past the house, one evening, at Mrs. Bondurant's side, and had marvelled accordingly at this evidence of their acquaintanceship. But Carolan now never sought her father. He afforded her no opportunity of meeting him. The calls of Brockholst were beginning to be more and more frequent, but he seldom made the least mention of his uncle's secretary.

"Carolan seems duller than when I first met him," were his words one day to Isabel. "But perhaps he has already passed the same comment on myself . . . who knows? Or perhaps," added the speaker, not without a vague derision that rang

discordantly at once to her who heard it, "he has been letting himself fall hopelessly in love."

"In love?" echoed Isabel, while she colored, remembering what she had learned not long ago from her father. "You don't mean . . ?" And then she came to a dead pause, feeling into what fatal awkwardness her own honesty could sometimes betray her.

Brockholst gave a hearty laugh. He was getting used to this complete absence of coquetry, and the more used to it he became the more it exerted over him a delicate and indescribable sorcery. "Oh, no," he cried, "I don't mean that he's in love with you any more. I did think so, ages ago — a whole fortnight ago if I'm not mistaken. But I don't think so any more. You mustn't expect too much from male human nature, you know." The derisive note crept into his voice again, as he went on: "It appears to be Mrs. Bondurant, now."

"I saw them walking together yesterday," said Isabel. "And it seemed so queer a thing for her to treat him even civilly, after the scornful way in which she used to speak of him."

"Oh, she's done queerer things than that in her day," said Brockholst mystically.

Isabel gave him a very earnest glance while he stroked his moustache and looked down, as though quite unaware of the lovely eyes levelled on him.

"Do you believe," came the almost solemnly

serious question, "that she's ever done anything which she herself thought to be thoroughly wrong?"

Brockholst quickly lifted his eyes to those of his questioner. Isabel's had so pure, cloudless, unflinching a fixity, and yet a gaze so wholly free from childishness on the one hand or consciousness of self on the other, that he felt like a veteran cynic while he was presently saying:

"Nearly everybody has done something, I should say, at some time in his or her life, which was thought to be thoroughly wrong."

"Ah, no, no," said Isabel, resolutely shaking her head, while a look of real pain swept over her face. "It's a bad enough world as it is. Don't try to make it worse, pray. There *are* some people in it (thank Heaven!) whom all the money in it couldn't force to do anything they thought thoroughly wrong!"

"There may be a good many such people," said Brockholst. "I hope there are. At present I can't feel perfectly confident except on the subject of one."

There was no mistaking his tone — or his undertone, either. "Pray don't even hint," said Isabel, with her superb frankness, which often shattered compliments like glass, notwithstanding that Brockholst's were somehow rarely displeasing to her — "pray don't even hint *I* am one of those people! I've never been tested yet. I've lived a

protected, tranquil, almost uneventful life. There's no telling what I might do if I were really tempted."

"It seems to me that there is telling," said Brockholst. "I mean as regards what you would *not* do."

"Ah," she said, smiling slightly and drooping her eyes for a moment. "That is kind of you . . . for I suppose you want it to be kind."

"I want it to be truthful. But have you any human ideals in the way of stolid resistance to temptation? Have you a friend, for example, whom you would at all times and under all stress of circumstances infallibly trust?"

Her thoughts flew on wings of love to her father. Whatever might be his implicating relations toward Carolan, they were surely nothing which could ever jeopardize his honorable place among his fellow-men. They might involve an imprudence, an impolitic and even foolhardy step, but by no possibility could they relate to any act through which his high and secure moral standard could be degraded. Her reflections had been almost inappreciably rapid, and hence with scarcely a shade of hesitation she answered:

"I have one friend of that sort — one friend of whom I feel entirely sure. My father."

"Ah," said Brockholst. . .

The next time he met her father a sort of tender halo seemed to hover about the man. There was a great deal in Coggeshal's personality, as it

affected his daughter's admirer, to corroborate this placid yet powerful confession of deep filial faith. In proportion as he yielded to the spell of Isabel, Brockholst now felt himself drawn toward one whom so taintless and womanly a spirit could approve and revere.

A day or two later, as Isabel was quitting the house, about an hour after breakfast-time, for the purpose of making some ordinary purchase in one of the shops not far away, she discovered her father talking with Carolan at the verge of the near roadside. She drew back for an instant, doubtful as to whether she should retrace her steps toward the porch just descended or continue them till they brought her in direct contact with the two speakers. She swiftly decided to walk straight on, and before she reached the limit of the meagre lawn she saw Carolan move away in the same direction that she herself had intended to take.

The meeting between the two men had been in every way accidental, and to Carolan it had been distressingly ill-timed. He had parted with Coggeshal, on their last interview, under conditions of cold threat and supercilious challenge. But intermediate developments had meanwhile wrought wondrous change. Carolan had a turmoil of consternation and misery to rouse if he had so chosen, but he did not choose. The earthquake must be brought about by another than himself; he had been waiting its appearance. Coggeshal, who had

simply met him by chance as he was taking a morning stroll, must be the first one to tell of disaster and open infamy. But Coggeshal had as yet no such disastrous tidings to convey, and the result had been that those few moments of converse were fraught, on either side, with a miserable mutual hanging of fire.

Isabel joined her father a few seconds after Carolan had turned his back upon him. The Irishman went up the road toward High Bridge, carelessly swinging his stick and unaware, through some chance failure to observe her, that she had come forth from the house at all. But Isabel had already made up her mind that her craved meeting with Carolan must happen now. And so, as she met her father face to face, she merely said: "A lovely morning, isn't it, papa?" and passed him, going straight out upon the roadside. Let her father think she was following Carolan, if he chose to think so. Perhaps he would be glad to think so. As it was, he did not detain her; he let her move past him and take the open road, while Carolan walked with his springing step full in view before her.

'Shall I hurry?' thought Isabel. But just then Carolan halted, tucked his stick under one arm, thrust both hands into his pockets, and slowly turned, with upraised head, as if to thoroughly inhale the charms of the breezy and melodious morning. A moment afterward he had seen Isabel, and she had perceived by his prompt change of



attitude that he had seen her. She urged her steps forward unhesitatingly. As she approached him, Carolan raised his hat.

"Good - morning," he said, soon afterward.  
"You're going my way?"

"Yes," answered Isabel.

"Do you object to my walking with you?"

"Not at all. I'm very happy to have you do so." The words, as she spoke them, brought a pang of inward shame to her; their falsity made them hateful. "I saw you speaking with papa a moment ago, did I not?"

"Yes." He was watching her with the corners of his eyes, and she noted this as he now proceeded: "We did not talk very long, but we spoke about you."

"About me?" she said, starting, as they slowly walked onward together.

"Yes. Your father was good enough to ask me why I did not come oftener to his house. I told him"— Here Carolan most abruptly paused. He was thinking of what effective falsehood he could coin. Whatever it would be, he was not afraid that Coggeshal would refute it. The man's late embarrassment during their brief accidental meeting had convinced him of that.

"Well," said Isabel, turning her face and looking at him with an expression that she could no more have made encouraging or captivating than she could have stilled or waked at pleasure the

liquid bird-notes that were being trilled now from adjacent trees. "What did you tell papa?"

She did not want the words to fall too coldly on his ear. She had already assured herself that she would use with him tact, diplomacy, deception, hypocrisy, any thing, to find out the secret of his influence over her father. And yet here she was, confronted by the imperiousness of her own honesty. She had not yet begun to play her part, and even now its enaction had grown detestable.

"I told your father," said Carolan, leaning a little nearer to her, and letting his musical voice take its deepest tone, "that you never treated me as if you cared to have me for a visitor."

"I?" Isabel faltered.

He laughed, and slashed at a weed on the path-border savagely with his cane. "Oh, yes—you! Is it such a surprise for you to hear this? Let me tell you that it's an old—a miserably old, story to *me*. Why, for the first three or four months after I came here with Mr. Chadwick, I wouldn't let myself believe that you meant to repulse me, to give me the cold shoulder. I fought against my own conviction. But at last I had to knock under, for there was no failing to see your—dislike. I can't call it by any other word. I hate beating about the bush. You do dislike me, and you know it. I allow that it's your own affair if you do. It's not a capital offence; you can't even be punished at all for it." His voice broke a little, just here.

"The punishment, as it might be said, falls on somebody else."

Isabel had never seen him like this before. Always previously the meretricious aids of the *poseur* had seemed to go with all that he said or did. Now the truth unaffectedly clothed him, for if there is one thing which love is eternally bent upon making us it is ourselves. The worst egotist and the most trained coquette are both instinctively aware of this, and their arts never become so deft and nimble as when (sometimes most unavailingly) they struggle for the concealment of passion.

"I don't think I have ever failed in the proper courtesy due you," said Isabel, "when you have been a guest of ours. But if I have—if it has appeared to you as though I disliked you and wished such dislike to transpire—then I most sincerely beg your pardon for my fault. And I should rank it a most grave fault," she added earnestly.

"Ah, good Heavens," Carolan murmured, with a gesture of intense impatience, "what you say sounds like the apology of a physician for performing some act of surgery."

"Oh, I meant nothing so cruel as that," said Isabel, with a little hopeless inflection.

"Surgery is never cruel; it's always merciful."

"But it wounds. Not needlessly, it is true. Still, I do not wish to wound at all. Life does enough of that to everybody."

"Right. It's pleasant to feel that you really have some mercy toward me, however."

"I have it — toward the whole world, I hope."

Carolán gave a short, bitter laugh. "Ah, that 'whole world'!" he exclaimed. "It strikes on me like a blast of freezing air. Talk of wanting bread and getting a stone!" He laughed again, just as briefly and joylessly as before. "Well, a man can't be jealous of the whole world, can he? I suppose, by the way, your philanthropy includes Mr. Lloyd Brockholst?"

He said this too seriously and even sorrowfully for her to resent it as an impertinence, or even to realize, while she colored under it, that it was one.

"Yes," she said, trying to smile and not succeeding at all well. "It includes him, I suppose, together with the rest of the species." Then she made sudden query: "Why do you mention *his* name? I hope *he* hasn't offended you?"

"Oh, yes, he has, very much. He has committed the fault of making you civil to him."

She bit her lip. "I see you're bent on giving me a bad character for exceptional politeness."

"No; I never complained of your lacking politeness. That is what you crushed me with — your politeness!"

They moved onward for some little time in silence. Isabel felt that she was woefully devoid of the equipments required of her by circumstance

for dealing with this man. *Finesse* and strategy were not her gifts, and the tactics of coquetry lay unreachably beyond her. If she adopted any distinct measure it must be that of plain appeal. She had learned that Carolan wanted to marry her. If so, there must be a fund of tenderness for her in his soul. Why not make a demand upon this, and get him to avow the truth regarding what hold he might possess over her father? Just as she had decided to speak again, Carolan said, in a changed voice, where the tremor of emotion was clearly evident:

“May I put a question to you?”

“Yes. What question?”

“This: Has your father told you that I—I am not happy because you care for me so little?”

His pace had grown slower, and she now had either to slacken hers or almost scornfully keep it as it had been. “Yes,” she answered, in lowered tones and with drooping eyes, “Papa did say . . something of that sort.”

“He said the truth, then.” A gap in the rich leafage that bushed far down the slope at whose edge their path lay, showed High Bridge, like a picture, with its drab arches bathed in the fresh morning glow, and the summer blue hollowed luminously and peacefully beyond it. “He said the truth,” Carolan repeated. She heard the passion in his voice, now, as any woman must have done. “I love you. I am wretched because you do not

love me — or perhaps I should say because you cannot love me ! ”

“ I do not — and can not,” Isabel replied. She stopped, and looked full at him as he stopped also. She was quite pale. “ When my father said that to me,” she went on, “ I was greatly surprised. But something else surprised me still more. I mean that papa should have seemed anxious to have me return this . . this feeling of which we now speak.”

“ Ah ! ” said Carolan, with a look of fierce pain, “ you thought it strange he should want you to marry a fellow like myself ! You wondered that he shouldn’t look higher for you than the dependent on old beau Chadwick’s whims — than beau Chadwick’s paid servant, in fact ! ”

“ No such thought entered my mind,” she replied, with a gentle dignity of mien and speech that became her to the eyes of her observer better than she knew or would have cared to know. “ I simply remembered that papa, who has always been like my second self, must long ago have seen the truth, provided I . . I had cared for you at all in that way. But, as it was, I could not help feeling that some unguessed relation between you and him had made him speak to me as he did.”

Carolan drew backward as her last words were given. “ Some unguessed relation ! ” he said, under his breath.

“ Yes,” hurried Isabel. “ You see, I conceal



nothing. I meet you as fairly as I can. I'll even confess to you that after what papa told me I had resolved to use a certain kind of . . of craft with you, and by this means prevail on you to disclose the secret, whatever it might be! But — ”

“The secret?” he broke in. She saw him change color, and hastily straighten his figure as if against the assault of some new-found antagonist.

“There *is* a secret!” she exclaimed. “I am certain of it! Papa has never even hinted to me that there was; don't suspect him or blame him. But I feel that all this gloom of his — this abstraction, this lapse from his old self to a self as different as day from night, is explainable only in one manner.”

“And that explanation . . ?”

“*You* can furnish it — not I,” she quickly returned. Her voice had become excited, and more supplicatory in proportion. “I can only imagine, speculate.”

He nodded several times, with his eyes fixed on her pale, determined yet wistful face. “I see. You think I must have some private means of badgering your father into indorsing me as your possible husband. You don't believe that he could ever have made such a proposal to you unless actual outside pressure had been brought to bear upon him.” Carolan had set his lips tightly together, and now he drew an audible breath through his dilated nostrils, while both eyes momentarily

closed. There was genuine suffering in all this; the *poseur* played no part in it whatever. "Oh, how exquisitely flattering!" he went on. "I wonder if you quite appreciate the depth or the delicacy of the compliment you are paying me."

"I meant no compliment," said Isabel — "and no insult, either." She spoke a little haughtily; she was just the girl to ruin her cause by impolitic anger. She had grown nettled at what seemed to her the wilfulness of Carolan's misinterpretations and the recurrence of his satirical reproaches. "I might have taken a very different course from this one. But I find that any thing except a straightforward course is next to impossible with me. I do not believe you to be a bad man, Mr. Carolan, but I shall almost believe it if you now persevere in refusing to make plain the mystery between yourself and my father."

He saw very clearly that she was becoming indignant, and her being so struck him as a harsh injustice. Could he help having loved her? She had always regarded him as some one but a little above the dirt of the roadway — yes, he had slight doubt of this, now, and he had always felt more than merely suspicious of it. She had grown persuaded that some sort of queer proceeding with himself must have threatened to compromise her beloved father — and why? Because (O coolly insulting deduction!) Coggeshal would never have

been willing, otherwise, that she should have married a poor Irish adventurer like himself.

If Isabel had exhibited anger, these quickly fermenting thoughts of Carolan's caused him to oppose it with an anger considerably more severe. It is never difficult for a lover who knows himself spiritually unworthy of the woman who refuses his suit, to persuade himself that he is rejected because of arrogance, ambition, or an over-weening egotism.

"Pray by what right," he said, with lips that had whitened and begun to quiver a little, "do you demand that I shall make anything plain which may lie between your father and myself? Are you aware that for you to prefer this demand at this particular time speaks by no means handsomely for your taste? And let me add, if you please —" he lifted his hat, now, and took a step or two forward, as though desirous of at once leaving her — "that whatever I *might* know as to why your father mopes or desponds, I should keep entirely to myself. But I profess no knowledge whatever on this point. Good-morning."

He had almost turned from her when Isabel stretched out one hand, and indeed imploringly. "Forgive me," she said, "if I have caused you further annoyance." She had got a beautiful color, now, and her eyes were star-like in their sweet ardor. "It seems that I am fated to do nothing to-day except offend you. You have told me that you — you loved me, and I have given you all the an-

swer I could give — all that I can ever give, though we were both to have a hundred years of youth. And now perhaps it is selfish for me to ask you if you will give *me* an answer. You know what I mean. And I don't think it selfish, either — I can't. It springs from the love that I feel for *him*. His peace of mind is immensely precious to me. If there has been some imprudence — some folly — some affair of debt, tell me! I am always fancying that it is an affair of debt," she ran on quite wildly at this point; "I can hardly see how it can be any thing else. He has never made his money-concerns very clear to me; he is naturally reticent about those. I mean he didn't speak of them at much length, and we always used to have so many other matters to talk about, papa and I. But in every thing else he has been the soul of confidence with me."

"And now he has ceased to be confidential," said Carolan huskily, but with a palpable sneer. "So you come to me for information — me, whom you think despicable as a husband but good enough to make a convenience of when the occasion suits!"

"Ah," cried Isabel, recoiling, and looking ired again. "You are incorrigible!"

"And why?" shot Carolan, his voice tremulous, his lips working. The raw, vulgar meanness of his whole past motive in having tempted Coggeshal to steal, now leapt from him, naked and odious, in his rage.

“Because I won’t turn and kiss your hand after it has slapped me in the face! Your father’s trouble is no interest of mine. How should it be? He may be the saint you think him or —”

“I have never said he was a saint,” Isabel broke in. If it had not been for this very father, whose source of distress she had sought with so pitifully bungling a candor to discover, she would have veered about, now, and left her companion with scarcely another glance. “But I am certain that no more honorable man lives than he,” she continued, the accent of pride which went with this sentence being as unconscious as the equally proud lifting of her head. “I did not suppose him disturbed by anything like repentance for — for” (she paused, as if seeking a word respectful enough while sufficiently strong) “a *misdeed*.”

“No,” retorted Carolan, with a kind of sardonic toss of the head. “I can understand that perfectly. You thought he might be suffering from some misdeed — as you prettily term it — done an inferior creature like myself. Still, we all make wonderful errors in these little life-times of ours. You despise *me* — you can deny it as often as you please, though I read it in you none the less clearly. But perhaps you might better save a little contempt for some one else — for your idol, your paragon, in fact! Go and tell him, if you choose, that I said this!”

He darted away from her the next minute. She

stood watching the swift swing of his gait along the tranquil, pastoral roadside. She grew pale with a great, benumbing, deadening fear. The fierce challenge in his final words haunted her terribly. She felt faint and chilled in the gay, warm summer sunshine. The very twitterings of the birds from the bosky acclivity near by rang with mockery in their music.

She had trusted her father so absolutely all her life! — as absolutely as from the first she had distrusted this jaunty, voluble, plausible Carolan. And now this same Carolan, who had been her father's close associate for weeks, had not only presumed to fling a slur upon Herbert Coggeshal's name, but had dared her, his daughter, to repeat the insult.

‘And I will repeat it,’ Isabel passionately thought, ‘just as he gave it.’ While this impetuous resolve was being taken, she turned her steps homeward once more, eager to find her father and gain the untold relief of his denial, his refutation.



## XIII.

For several days Carolan had not presented himself at Mrs. Bondurant's cottage. She had grown impatient at this wholly unexpected absence. It did not at all harmonize with her plans. When Carolan had last left her she had begun to assure herself that the end of her desire was perhaps nearer attainment than logical survey might concede. She had pleased him; he might be in love with Isabel Coggeshal, but this attachment did not prevent him from warming very responsively to her calculated blandishments. He was far enough from nursing the least sentiment for her except one of gallant admiration. She had been grateful to Providence on this account — or so she firmly induced herself to believe; but whether, in her present lonely lack of all court-paying from the other sex, she would have found pleasure in the amorous deportment of even a man as distasteful to her as this semi-Bohemian Irishman, is a question on which it would be rash to build negative theories. In any case, she had congratulated even a force as confessedly inimical as her own destiny on the milder turn which their

current of acquaintanceship had taken. 'There really seems no danger of his falling in love with me,' she had of late told her own thoughts: 'and it is indeed enormously fortunate that there doesn't. I don't know what on earth I should have done if he had developed an actual tenderness. It would have been like a compliment from one's groom; he is so abominably second-rate. However, all that is settled now.'

It was by no means settled, on the other hand, that Carolan should stay away from the cottage as at present. Mrs. Bondurant had just made up her mind that she would send him a politely provocative little note regarding a magazine which he had promised to loan her, when one cloudy, dull, hot afternoon his foot sounded on the steps of her porch.

She at once saw that he was *distract* and out of spirits. "I've had a fit of the blues," he replied to her, when she reproached him for his desertion. "I would have bored you miserably if I had come any sooner."

"But it would not have bored me at all to administer consolation," she said. "I should have doted on doing so." She gave a little soft sigh, here. "Still, perhaps that would have been out of my line altogether."

"Oh, no; by no means," he answered. "I came to you as soon as I felt myself able to walk without crutches."

"I see. So you've received an injury. But it hasn't lamed you for life?"

"I'm afraid it has."

"You've received it from Isabel Coggeshal? Come, admit that you have."

"Well . . perhaps."

"Then it's curable. You're too brilliant and fine a fellow to suffer long when hurt from such a source as that."

Carolán frowned a little. "You don't like her," he said. "I've noticed that you don't."

"I don't like you to like her too much. There's a difference. By the way, I dropped in to see the Coggeshals yesterday. It was only for a *petit quart d'heure*, you know; I was passing the house; I had been taking a little stroll; it was about your time for taking one, and I thought I might meet you. Well, I dropped in, as I said. That inexpressible Mrs. Coulter did not happen to be there, talking over the grand alliance of her son with a daughter of *la race* Coggeshal. I was so thankful; that woman! *elle me donne des nerfs*. But I had to concern myself almost entirely with Mrs. Coggeshal and Sadie. Isabel had her hands full. Mr. Brockholst had brought her over a book of his sketches and they were looking at them together. He is so clever, that Brockholst. He does nearly every thing, in a small sort of way."

"Does he?" said Carolán moodily. "I suppose

he flirts in a small sort of way, too. Or is that a large way?"

"Flirt? upon my word I don't know. We were acquaintances long ago in Paris, as I believe I told you."

"Yes."

"Then he was thought clever. And he is. He draws a little, he paints a little, he rides, skates, plays neatly the games men like . . and, by the by, he writes, too, I believe."

"Ah, he writes, does he?" muttered Carolan, a little absently.

"I believe so . . . Isabel and he seem on very good terms. The idea came to me, do you know, that he might care to marry her."

"Ah?"

"Yes. Of course it would be a great chance, a huge chance, for her, if he took the fancy."

Carolan lifted his shoulders and made a little gesture with both hands. "Yes," he said, "provided *she* took the fancy also."

"*She!*" exclaimed Mrs. Bondurant, wide-eyed and smiling. "Why, what *do* you mean?"

"She has her . . her caprices — her prejudices. I mean that."

The widow burst into a high, long laugh. "Do you think she wouldn't marry Lloyd Brockholst if he asked her? *Can* you think it, really? Ah, give her the chance once — only once!"

She saw that she was torturing him. She was

certain that some recent interview with Isabel had soured and discomfited him. If he had any scandalous knowledge regarding Coggeshal, this was just the time to lure it from his lips. Piqued and chagrined, he might make her his confidante before he himself well realized that he had done so.

"I don't want to give her the chance," he said, lifting a little bronze paper-weight off the sitting-room table near which his chair happened to be placed, and tossing it aimlessly from one hand to another. "But I suppose she will take it. I agree with you that she will take it, if she gets it."

"What girl in her position wouldn't take it? Think of how she is placed. They call her father a successful novelist. But what does that mean? He may make a few thousands out of this last book of his — the book that has sold so. But his next book may be the dullest of failures."

"True."

"Still, Isabel is very proud of his success. I really think she prides herself vastly on it. I daresay she would answer Lloyd Brockholst quite condescendingly if he should talk marriage to her, simply because she is the daughter of the famous gentleman who wrote 'Rachel Rand.' Have you read that novel, by the way?"

"Oh, yes," said Carolan. "Have you?"

"Yes. It's bright, of course."

"Yes; it's bright."

"I sometimes suspect that Isabel helped her father with it. She might have done so. I never dreamed of denying her brains, though she is so proud."

"Proud?"

"Oh, dreadfully. Haven't you noticed it? But you're in love with her — lovers never see their mistresses' faults till they become their husbands and sometimes not even then. *Now* she's prouder still because of the success that book has achieved. I knew her before it appeared, and I've noticed the difference it has made in her. She believes nobody else in the world could have written it except her father. Not very long ago she said to me: 'Papa's genius doesn't really lie in the direction of a popular book like that; but he determined to please the large mass for once, and his mind is so rich a one that he had only to make the effort in order to win the due reward.' Oh, yes; she believes her father could produce twenty more 'Rachel Rands' if he only chose."

All this time Mrs. Bondurant was watching her companion's face with a covert yet vigilant scrutiny. Every shade of expression there was apparent to her. She was prepared, on this account, for such angry words as the following, though not for their acute suggestiveness:

"I didn't know her infatuation had reached that absurd point. However, she may be undeceived soon enough."



"Undeceived?" the widow repeated, with a soft laugh. "Oh, that is hardly likely. He's her father, you know. And then there *is* no denying the ability displayed in that book."

"No," said Carolan, in tones that were curt and almost surly as well. "There *is* no denying it. You're quite right."

"Well, if she marries Brockholst he'll give money and position, she'll give what one might call literary prestige. That is what will be said, any way."

"Literary prestige!" laughed Carolan, as if to himself. He spoke the words in so low a voice that she could just catch them. He suddenly gave Mrs. Bondurant a searching look, while she sat quietly fanning herself, — with nothing in her composed demeanor to even vaguely hint that she would lose at least three months out of her life could she but prick and spur him into some sort of noteworthy disclosure. Then he drew his chair closer to her own, and leaned forward, peering up into her face, with both arms pressed against his knees.

"It's a most infernal sensation," he said, "to feel yourself held at a distance, repulsed, magnificently walked over, — and yet to be without redress. That is my situation just now. But a little while ago I — I held all the cards in the game."

Mrs. Bondurant's heart began to beat. She did not dare open her lips, but merely put into her

eyes as intelligent and yet as sympathetic an expression as she could muster, and slowly inclined her head, letting the fan sink upon her lap. A word too much, a word too little, perhaps any word at all, might send the information which it looked as if she were about to secure, darting off into ambuscades of reticence again, with deer-like celerity.

"Yes," Carolan went on, "Isabel Coggeshal wouldn't have found it very easy, a comparatively short interval ago, to flout me as though I had been an amorous coachman. Or, if she *had* done this, she'd soon have allowed her mistake."

Mrs. Bondurant smiled. "Ah, I don't think you judge Isabel rightly," she now said. "Before Brockholst came upon the scene she was very much the same as she is at present."

"I don't allude to Brockholst," Carolan said, stung afresh by this bit of counterfeited misunderstanding on the part of his astute hostess. "I am thinking of something wholly different from Brockholst." He laughed more bitterly than she had yet heard him. "Ah!" he cried, with a really savage flash of the eyes, "you believe she aims to marry that fellow, eh? God help her, if she does! I couldn't punish her better for her scorn of me and my suit than to wish a marriage with Brockholst should grow the ruling idea of her life!"

"You puzzle me," Mrs. Bondurant murmured.

He looked at her steadily again. "Oh, I suppose I do. Of course I must. It would be amazing if I didn't."

"But you talk as if there had been a time, not very distant, when you could have forced Isabel Coggeshal to become your wife."

Carolán's look sought the carpet. "Well . . and if there was?"

She leaned nearer to him and laid her hand on his shoulder. "My good friend," she said, "let me give you a piece of solid advice. I know you will pardon me if I do so, for I have seen such a vast amount of what is called the world; I'm such a war-worn old veteran at that sort of thing — or amazon, I suppose some people would call me."

"Well?" he said, meeting her glance. "Your piece of advice is . . ?"

"This: Never say to any one else what you've just said to me. Never let another soul imagine that you had any compulsory power of that sort. It would be ruinous to you."

"Ruinous?"

"In the way of ridicule — yes. Nobody would believe you; everybody would laugh at you. Now, you're not offended with me, are you? I mean it, you know, in nothing but the most friendly spirit."

"Of course you do," he returned, with a sullen, dogged tone. "And you are inwardly disbelieving me yourself; you are inwardly laughing at me

yourself. You think my late declaration the merest inane bravado."

She withdrew her hand from his shoulder; she leaned back in her chair again, and began indolently to sway her fan; she let a little treble ripple of laughter leave her lips. "I think you are unhappy," she said. "That is all. Or, if you would like me to be more explicit, I'll add that I think Isabel Coggeshal has been treating you rather superciliously."

He made an irritated gesture. "If I thought you could keep a secret —" he broke forth, and then stopped short. In an altered voice he presently continued: "But they say no woman can."

She repeated her light, delicate little laugh. She was playing her part well, and yet she had dangerously sunk her own individuality into it. Her exaggerations, her expletives, her adjectives of intensity and superfluity, had wholly died away. She was far more artificial than she herself perceived. Still, Carolan was in no mood for subtle observations.

"I can keep a secret," she said. "I've always prided myself on that gift. But you have no secret to reveal. You are merely trying to fool me. You know, I told you some time ago that you were a *farceur*, and you are one. Bah, *mon cher*! You never made Isabel Coggeshal compromise herself. I'm too well acquainted with her to credit that. I

wouldn't believe it of her if you got down on your knees and swore it."

"I never wanted you to even dream of such a thing," he quickly retorted.

"No? Well, then, how could you have any power over her? You, or any one in all creation! There she stands, pure as snow and quite as cold, with her faith in herself and her faith in the genius of her father. As for the latter . . . well, I don't blame her for it. It seems to me that I would assume airs, too, if I had had a father who could have written a 'Rachel Rand.'"

"*Did* he write 'Rachel Rand'?" sped abruptly from Carolan.

Mrs. Bondurant felt a thrill run through every nerve in her body. "Good gracious!" she said, with a drawl that was the best touch of mimetic art she had thus far shown. "You're not going to tell me that *you* wrote it! I dare say you *could* have done so. But no — preposterous! It's his; it's signed with his name."

Carolan kept silent . . . Had she gone too far? She had reached the very verge of discovery. How exasperating if she should be driven back at this momentous point in her careful efforts!

"Yes, it's signed with his name," Carolan said, as if he spoke the words between set teeth. And then he suddenly rose. "I must go," he said, "good-day." He put out his hand to her, but she did not take it. She remained seated, looking up

at him placidly, though she felt like darting from her chair and forcing him back into his own.

"Are you going," she asked, "without telling me your secret?"

He appeared like a man whom some calming visitation has newly influenced. "Pshaw, there is no secret," he said. He took out his watch and hurriedly glanced at it. "Mr. Chadwick will want me in about ten minutes," he went on. "There is an electrical doctor coming from town to put him in some sort of a bath. I must be there for my Rhadamanthus to snub me. His cure wouldn't do him any good unless I was there for him to snub me while I undressed him and to snub me afterward because the bath hadn't sufficiently invigorated him. Won't you shake hands with me?"

"No," said Mrs. Bondurant. She saw her defeat, now, and she never disliked Carolan as much as she did at the present moment.

"No?" he iterated, drawing back from her. "And why not?"

She rose. "You distrust me," she said, "you treat me as if you thought me a mere toy for your moods. But you have made one thing clear to me: I mean your assertion, in so many words, that Herbert Coggeshal did not write 'Rachel Rand,' and that you know who did."

"I?"

"Yes — you. That explains the power which



you stated that you held over Isabel Coggeshal. You even boasted of that power. If you possessed it once, why have you lost it now? You need not answer; I don't want you to answer. You have told me that I could not keep a secret. I mean to show you now that I can at least expose brag-gadocio."

She was trying threat as a sort of forlorn hope. Several days ago she had said to herself: 'What a fool I am, after all, to waste time with this uninteresting Carolan! I could send Brockholst a note in a disguised handwriting, requesting him to take a look into the pages of "Rachel Rand." Though he might treat the note as anonymous, he would still read the novel. And if he read the novel he would certainly recognize it as his own — or not so recognize it. But my only trouble would be, in the event of his learning the fraud, that I must deal my little telling blow of revenge from ambush — *à la dérobée*. And I don't want to do that. I want to be acquainted with the full details; I want to pay him back in person; I want to see how he receives the news that he has fallen in love with the daughter of a forger — after having expressed his high and mighty reluctance to be reconciled with me.'

But now she would write her anonymous note. Let Carolan go. If this last attitude of menace did not move him, well and good. She would drop him as deliberately as she had taken him up.

After all, he had been of service; he had corroborated her suspicions; he had made her more secure than ever in her convictions that Isabel's father had acted criminally.

She met the look that Carolan now gave her with one of haughty indifference. But she saw that it was a look fraught with both fear and anger.

"How can you expose my braggadocio, as you are pleased to call it?" he demanded.

"How?" she answered. "Why, by telling Isabel that you have thrown doubts on her father's right to the authorship of the last book published under his name."

To her astonishment, he threw himself back into the chair which he had so lately quitted. "You are a very clever woman," he said. "But you have the rapacious curiosity of all your sex. Still, there is something about your present energy that makes me sure mere curiosity is not its only motive. Don't imagine you have deceived me. You did, at first, I admit. But on a sudden I felt you were trying to use me, and I consequently rebelled. That was natural enough." He paused, looking up at her while she still stood at a slight distance from his side, forbidding and unappeased. "Tell me," he said; "do you hate Isabel Coggeshal?"

"No."

"Do you love Lloyd Brockholst?"

She sank back into her own chair. Their eyes met on a level, as it were, then. "I used to care for him once — years ago — in Paris," she replied. "But all that is past now. I —"

"You hate him now," he broke in. "There's your motive. I've found it at last. Have I not?"

"My motive for what?" she questioned parryingly.

"For wishing to learn whether Isabel Coggeshal's father is a thief or not."

"Well . . perhaps. *Is* he a thief?"

"I thought so once."

"And now you doubt it?"

"I have lost interest in the matter of his guilt or innocence."

Her black eyes swept his face for an instant, and very searchingly. "Why?" she said. "Because you knew 'Rachel Rand' had not been written by Coggeshal, and yet did *not* know who was its real author till lately?"

He stared at her. "Are you a wizard?" he said.

"Never mind. You called me a clever woman. I hug the compliment. Answer my question, please."

"Do *you* know the real author?" he said.

"You reply with a question, not an answer."

"I think you do know," he persisted, "for some reason. How did you guess?"

She shook her head resolutely. "I shall only be sure when you have told me."

"The truth will transpire soon enough. At any moment it may transpire."

She leaned much nearer to him, and once more she laid her hand on his arm.

"Do you mean that it will transpire when Brockholst reads 'Rachel Rand'?"

"Yes."

"Then Brockholst wrote 'Rachel Rand'?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Bondurant drew a long breath. The secret was out at last! Her forlorn hope had not been so futile, after all; it had achieved more than her shrewdest niceties of tact had done. But all had not been told yet. Her battle had been only half gained. She saw distrust and regret already in Carolan's face. He must not be allowed to repent of his confidence so speedily; it had not yet been either sufficiently copious or succinct.

"My friend!" she exclaimed. "You have told me thus much. Tell me the rest!"

"The rest?"

"Yes. Tell me *all*! you have gone so far that I shall believe you think me capable of meanly betraying you if you stop there." She gave a soft, trembling sigh. "Whatever else I am, I'm not deceitful. My worst enemy never said *that* of me. Of course I would not have spoken a word relating to this matter. I was angry, a little while ago

simply because you hurt me to — to the very soul. I — I thought we were such friends, you and I! Once I had a feeling for Lloyd Brockholst, but all that is quite dead and gone, now. You love Isabel, and if you tell me *everything* I may help you, my friend — my admired, talented, brilliant friend! — to win her, after all. You deserve her. Yes, far more than *he* does!”

All this was balm to Carolan's vanity. He had thought of leaving High Bridge before the discovery came, now that Isabel's indifference toward him had appeared so unconquerable. But perhaps if he made Mrs. Bondurant a full confidence her woman's wit might suggest some new line of action or defence undreamed of before . . . And then she had professed such loyalty to him. Why should she not admire him and think him brilliant? If he had not been in love with Isabel he might have shown her powers of personal fascination which even then she was far from guessing.

He had set his eyes on the floor while she addressed him, but he now lifted them. She saw acquiescence in their look. She knew, then, that she had played successfully with his vanity, and that her complete triumph was near.

She was right. He had soon told her every thing.

## XIV.

LEAVING Carolan, that morning, Isabel had hurried straight home. Her heart was throbbing with a sense of insult and indignity all the stronger because it concerned her father and not herself. She recalled just what Carolan had said, and it seemed as if her feet could not bear her fast enough to Coggeshal's presence, in order that she might repeat the outraging innuendo precisely as it had been delivered.

But by degrees a change began to color Isabel's resolve. Her step slackened its speed as she walked onward. She must tell her father everything or nothing. Would he care to hear that she had asked Carolan for an explanation of the mysterious bond between them? Might he not even haughtily condemn her course in this respect as unwarrantable interference? Isabel soon lamented her own blundering simplicity. Her method had been the exact opposite of that which we have seen Mrs. Bondurant employ. She had really learned scarcely anything whatever, and she had made her desire to learn a great deal appear strikingly evident. As for the insinuation



against her father, to what had that truly amounted? Observed without the magnifying force of her own filial partisanship, had it been so highly terrible an assertion? Carolan had been angered by what he believed her merciless and scornful treatment of him. The sneer he had flung at her father may have had no origin except that of random and passionate resentment; he had seen that she was very vulnerable where it became a question of paternal faultlessness. Decidedly, if she were to tell her father all, a serious quarrel might be the result. It was not so difficult to quarrel with him now as it had been of old. No; she had failed—at least for the present—and must accept the depressing consequences of her failure.

But a new load of anxiety must henceforth weigh upon her spirits. The possibility that Herbert Coggeshal might, after all, have soiled himself by some base act, would hereafter glide most darkly between herself and the sun. On the following afternoon, when Brockholst proposed a stroll as far as the Bridge, she wondered if her gloomy and haunted state of mind would have held such a diversion as even endurable had it not been for that one especial personality. He had asked her to go with him, and she had already learned enough of the attraction which his society could exert over her to feel that there was no more potent way of forgetting all worriment than

by yielding herself to the delightful spell of his conversation and his company.

But he noticed, just before they started on their walk, that she had betrayed languor, taciturnity, reserve, he could scarcely define just which it was. "Are you not well to-day?" he asked, as they were quitting the house side by side.

"Yes," she said; "do I not seem so?"

"You seem a little . . . preoccupied," he answered, as if glad to get the euphemistic and not too convicting word. "That is all. But perhaps my own dulness is alone to blame."

"Your dulness?" she echoed, with what he found a sweet compliment in the spontaneous incredulity of her accent.

"Oh, we're all chameleons, more or less, I begin to believe; we take the hues and tints of our surroundings. And my domestic ones are certainly not enlivening. There is uncle Andreas, with whom I spend three or four good hours every day. Matters usually begin rather well. The old gentleman's early morning intelligence, if I may call it that, is quite nimble and at times trustworthy. His memory trips along very creditably; it doesn't want much of a stick. He talks about the past (and he is always talking about the past, by the by) with a rational respect for dates—a decent avoidance of anachronisms. And then, all at once, the mists begin to crowd in upon him. He is like a day on some of the English sea-coasts; he begins

well — shinningly, in fact ; but before long he is befogged, and wearisomely so, after you grow accustomed to the grotesqueness of it all — and the pathos, too.”

“I should not think one would ever grow accustomed to the pathos,” said Isabel.

Brockholst smiled. “A woman would not.” He paused for a little space. “A woman like you never would,” he added. “But we men, except when we are poets, or beings of that generally finer calibre, nearly always grow accustomed to all pathos. We’ve a toughness that sometimes ossifies into the most genteel sort of brutality.”

“You may or you may not be wronging your sex,” said Isabel, with a prettily perverse gesture. “I’m not woman of the world enough to argue that point. But I feel very sure you are wronging one member of your sex.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to paint myself a monster of even the mildest complexion ; I’m afraid I have quite too much vanity for that kind of self-depreciation . . . Well, then there is Carolan, who impresses me, just now, as tedious and conventional. I was prepared to be amused by him. He started off, so to speak, with considerable dash and spirit, but latterly he has become tame, at times almost leaden. I don’t think his health is just what it was. I sometimes catch him staring at me, when we are together, in a blank, purposeless fashion. And we are a good deal together ; it’s inevitable,

you know. Yesterday I asked him if he had ever had a touch of the malaria which they say thrives here so vigorously — here, of all places on earth for my poor invalid uncle to come, if it does! But Carolan roundly asserted that he never felt better in his life. So I held my peace. I didn't say anything about Mrs. Bondurant. He might have taken it hard, so soon after my mention of malaria."

"How you dislike that woman!" Isabel exclaimed.

"Does it strike you that way?" he said, with a little careless laugh. "Oh, well, do not let us exploit my dislike — if it exists; I don't really grant that it does . . . What a fine view of the Bridge! But we shall have a finer view, presently, on the Bridge itself."

They soon stood there. The summer afternoon had almost waned to twilight. The sky was tenderly blue, with some vapory films of cloud draped along its lucid arch of color. Northward they saw the river far below them glitter on between dark, sloping banks of leafage, with here and there a gleam of roof and chimney to tell of some hidden homestead. Southward lay the huge city, with every trait of ugliness mellowed and beautified by distance. A fresh breeze came hurrying from the unseen sea, and as it delicately smote their faces a sense was conveyed to them, by this fluttering and salubrious wafture, of the superb solidity on

which they were walking. What might, what resistance, what permanence, its monstrous span of stone bespoke! How it would live on, ages after the echoes of the countless feet which had paced its firm, smooth path had died into eternal silence!

"Three or four centuries from now," said Isabel, breaking a little pause, "people will be walking here just as we are walking to-day."

"Say ten centuries from now," replied Brockholst. "New York is out of what they call the earthquake-belt, I believe, and nothing but an earthquake could dislodge the huge buttresses beneath us. But the most marvellous part of the whole magnificent affair," he pursued, "is the office which it performs. It is the very artery of life to the enormous city lying just beyond it. When we reach its further end we can hear the water pulsing in the sluice-house on that Eastern side. They tell me that a year or two ago you could go inside of the stone vault and both hear and see the water as it rushed fresh and vital from Croton river; but I fancy that we must merely listen to it, now, outside the grated iron door."

This was true. The sluice-house had been locked, and when they arrived at the further end of the Bridge, they could only stand and hear the hollow, throbbing, liquid gurgle within.

"What a chance for a supreme assassin!" said Brockholst. "Imagine a conspiracy to poison the

whole city. A band of men creep here at midnight, and wrench open this iron door. They are provided with tons of arsenic or strychnine. They drop them into those waters which are rushing now to quench the thirst of two millions of people. . It's melodramatic, but it's genuinely horrifying. It reminds one of Victor Hugo at his most grandiose."

The sky had grown exquisitely peaceful as they strolled back. No lights had yet appeared in the vague city, but its clustered structures, viewed from this commandant height, were bathed in purplish hazes. A few row-boats on the glistening river looked almost as minute as bunches of drifted seaweed. The high leaf-clad banks outlined themselves against the dusky azure of the heavens with an untold solemnity of grace. Brockholst and Isabel paused when they had reached the centre of the Bridge, and leaned over the ledge that borders it.

"A moment ago," said Isabel, "you spoke of the chance for an assassin. When we look down, now, and see those boats turned so tiny, I am tempted to think of the chance for a suicide."

"True enough," he returned. "And yet there are no such ghastly records connected with the Bridge. I haven't heard of one; have you?"

"No," she answered. The word sounded weak to him in its utterance, and suddenly he saw that she had grown very pale. She moved dizzily back-



ward the next moment, and he at once put his arm about her waist, quickly saying:

"You are ill."

"Yes — ill," she faltered. It was all she could say.

"Take my arm," he ordered sharply, presenting his arm to her on the instant. She slipped her hand into it. "Can you walk?" he went on anxiously, bending to look into her changed face.

"Oh, yes," she said, though in the most insecure tones. And immediately she burst into a hysterical little laugh. "I — I can walk perfectly well. My head is swimming — that is all . . . and I had a sort of ghastly idea . . . Come; let us get off the Bridge — I will be better, then, I know."

He moved with her rapidly and in silence until they had reached the roadway on the Western side. She had walked capably enough, all this time, and at length she withdrew her hand from his arm, saying in a tone which would have been almost her usual one but for a lingering trace of tremor:

"What a fool I have acted like! It was all the merest nonsense, you know. I fancied — " And there she stopped, abruptly.

"That you might fling yourself off?" he questioned. "That is a nervous feeling quite common with certain temperaments. I've even had it myself, in a mild way. I remember, once, on the Rigi, there in Switzerland, I — "

"No, no," she interrupted. "It was not *that*

feeling. It was more as if some one whom I loved — some friend or relation — were . . .” But here she broke off, with a self-irritated toss of the head. “Oh, please don’t think of it any more. Let us speak of something else. I — I want to forget it.”

During two or three of their subsequent interviews Brockholst referred to that little incident on the Bridge, once jocosely quoting from Tennyson and calling it her “weird seizure;” but Isabel gave no encouragement to the jest, stingless though it was plainly meant to fall. Her duties in the way of preparation for Sadie’s wedding were now onerous enough to prevent her from always seeing Brockholst when he called. But on such occasions he would frequently drop into Coggeshal’s study, greatly to his daughter’s gratification. Isabel had seen that the younger man had power to rouse and please the elder; no one else produced just this effect on her father, and indeed where could be found in the whole neighborhood a man or woman who possessed a tithe of Brockholst’s intellectual charm?

Four or five days after the little episode at High Bridge, on what happened to be a Sunday afternoon, Brockholst was considerably surprised to discover Isabel, as he looked through the green-blind doors opening from porch to hall, in close conversation with Clarry Coulter. The new-comer gave a violent cough and then put his head between the doors, asking whether Mr. Coulter considered this

at all the proper kind of conduct on the eve of his marriage to another lady. Clarry laughed; he and Brockholst were on the best of terms; he thought Isabel's friend a little too dandified; still, Clarry had a very wide charity, besides an expansive knowledge of current human affairs. You had to meet those kinds of fellows pretty often down at the Bank, he had informed Sadie. They thought themselves swells, and he supposed they were — if it was anything, one way or another, to be a swell. But Brockholst was better than the majority — oh, yes! He hadn't half the usual amount of conceit; in fact, it didn't look as if he had any conceit at all. The sweetheart of Sadie might have used his experience in reflecting — that although all 'swells' are by no means gentlemen, a combination of the best elements that enter each class is entirely conceivable.

"Clarry and I were having a most important consultation together," said Isabel presently. "I hope you don't mind my telling what it was about, Clarry," she continued, looking full into the latter's good-humored face.

"Oh, no," said Clarry, with a mournful note in his voice. "But it won't be of any use, Isabel, if Mr. Brockholst *should* agree with you. Sadie will have her own way, all the same."

"What is the mystery?" said Brockholst, who had just seated himself, and who now crossed his legs with the air of a man who will not bear it at

all resignedly if he is not entertained by coming developments. "But I warn you beforehand, Coulter," he continued, with a dark frown at Clarry, "that I shall take the side of Miss Isabel without the least regard to whether she strikes me as being right or wrong."

"Sadie has resolved that Clarry shall be married in a dress-coat," said Isabel, her voice dolefully comic. "But the wedding is at one o'clock in the day. I tell Clarry that he ought to put his foot down."

"Yes, down on the dress-coat and keep it there," said Brockholst, laughing. "It's evening-gear, you know, Coulter," he added. "It's as black as a bat, and only steals out after dark, just like one."

"Oh, I *know* all that," said Clarry serenely. He had known nothing whatever on the subject until Isabel had presented to him her elucidating counsels. "But Sadie thinks it won't look right unless I have on a white cravat and a swallow-tail."

"You don't advise Sadie as to the quality of her veil, do you?" appealed Isabel. "You don't interfere, do you, with the length of her train?"

"Oh, good gracious!" exclaimed Brockholst; "how can you talk to a bridegroom about interfering with his bride's train? It's too awfully suggestive. It's like dropping the ring, or kneeling down at the wrong time."

Clarry and Isabel both laughed; but Isabel soon said severely to the author of their mirth:

"I'm afraid you are siding against me and not with me."

"No, you're wrong," declared Brockholst. "And I'm sure our persuasions must prevail in the end with Coulter. He has, I feel certain, quite too much real moral principle to walk up a church-aisle at one o'clock A.M. in an evening-garment. I am certain that his innate nobility of character will finally help him through. I've great faith in a clean conscience to resist even powerful temptations of this sort. Of course there can't be any doubt as to the legality of the marriage if performed under those terrible conditions. I will admit that there ought to be, but I fear there isn't. It's a matter of personal integrity rather than one of legal right" . . .

"You have so turned the whole affair into ridicule," said Isabel to him, some little while afterward, when he and she were alone together, "that Sadie will no doubt gain a complete triumph, and Clarry will allow himself to be married precisely in the clothes she has selected for him. But very probably Sadie would have had her way in any case. She usually does have it."

"And after all," said Brockholst, with a shrug of the shoulders, "why let so trifling a circumstance fret you for an instant?" It was a delicious afternoon, almost as cool as early Autumn, with an Autumnal diamond light in the unclouded sky and a great breezy pulsation on all the wooded

hillsides. They had left the house, and had rambled into a glade where prongs of granite rock broke the smooth short-grassed soil and some huge murmurous chestnuts and hickories lifted their gloss and vigor of umbrage. Isabel had found a seat on one of the gray stone ledges, and Brockholst sat facing her on the surprisingly comfortable accommodation made by an old low tree-stump, whose once hardy fibres were now more than half a pulpy bronze-brown decay. It was Sunday, and the musical merriment at the casinos floated to them incessantly in by no means unpleasing echoes. People were not far off, wandering in groups or pairs through the leafy glades and passes. But their own privacy was quite as secure as they could have wished it just then. They were a part of all the harmless rustic holiday and yet agreeably exempt from its coarser popular features. "Suppose your sister does win the day," he went on, "and Clarry Coulter impiously lets the glare of sunshine fall upon a suit of evening broadcloth. Kingdoms will not shake on that account. Surely you must pardon me for saying it, but I thought you far too sensible for the voluntary waste of time involved by such trivial details."

"They are trivial," she replied, looking down at a little bunch of yellow wildflowers that she had lately gathered. "But they mean a great deal to me, somehow, placed just as I am placed."



“What do they mean?” he asked softly. “Tell me.”

“You must understand—you must see,” she said, letting her eyes dwell for a moment intently upon his. “A feather shows which way the wind blows, and they are just the little insignificant feathers that annoy me by making it evident how different is my atmosphere of opinion, of association—yes, even of education as well—from that of Sadie and mamma . . . I sometimes regret those days of schooling abroad—those chances which have come to me for watching, even at such a distance as my present retirement necessitates, the nicer usages and customs. If I had never known any but the humdrum and ordinary phases of living, I often tell myself that I could now live much more contentedly. It isn’t that I sigh for the smartness and fashion with which many people embellish all their abundant leisure. But the outward air of things must always please or displease me, now; I am sensitive to faults of taste which I might never have noticed, lapses in deportment which would not have caused in me a ripple of annoyance. I speak of this difference between us, but you must not fancy for an instant that I do not dearly love Sadie and mamma.”

“I do not even fancy it,” he said.

“It is because I love them so that I can see more plainly their little social shortcomings. Ah, what a strange thing is this standard of manners that

we set up for ourselves so arbitrarily, and how we quarrel with any one who presumes to rebel against its exactions! Now, from a certain liberal and far more natural view of the case, I can't but think my interest in the cut of poor Clarry's clothes at his wedding to be almost ridiculous. And yet it's not the mere wearing of those clothes; it's the thought of Sadie's marrying anybody to whom the accepted conventionality of every-day attire for such an hour isn't an easy and familiar habit. I suppose there is no compromise between all this and the charge of snobbery, frivolity. I should be above these light details. And alas! so I would be if they were not always made to seem unduly important on account of their neglect."

"It all comes to this, I should say," Brockholst answered. "You are more your father's daughter than your mother's, and with Sadie it is quite the opposite."

"It is not wholly papa's influence, though very possibly that is the origin of it. I have got to feel that there are so many small definitions of 'high-breeding' besides the larger ones."

"And you've mastered them all."

She laughed a little wearily. "Oh, I dare say I'm 'correct,' if you mean that. I wouldn't do some of the things that Sadie does, for the world. I wouldn't insist, as she does, that Clarry's card in the wedding-invitation should be plain 'Clarence Coulter,' without the 'Mr.' But Sadie will not

hear of the 'Mr.' She calls it 'stuck up.' The bridegroom of a girl-friend of hers did not have the 'Mr.,' and that is sufficient for Sadie. I can't tell you how I hate to be obliged to argue these minor objections, apart from making them! And especially as my arguments are nearly always vain."

"There isn't any thing at all surprising about your annoyance," said Brockholst. "What surprises me more is the incompatibility of which you speak. And yet you went abroad, while your sister staid at home. You had 'advantages,' as they call them; you got quite out of the rural ruts, so to speak. You acquired, perhaps without knowing it, a distaste for provincialisms, and your native aptitude did the rest. I agree with you that you could never do a great deal that Sadie does. You could never, for example, marry a Clarry Coulter."

"Decidedly not!" exclaimed Isabel.

"Perhaps you can never marry at all."

"I never marry? and why?"

"Because you will never like any man well enough."

"Do you think me as cold as that?" she asked.

"Not cold. We'll say — unvanquished."

She was looking down at her bunch of wildflowers. "I don't ever remember being invaded."

"Don't you?" he said, rapping the point of his cane rather fiercely, from where he sat just in

front of her, against the yielding, inoffensive sward.

"No," she quietly persisted.

"But you're not one of those who ever wilfully shut their eyes to . . to the truth."

"I hope not."

"Then you ought to have seen the . . the enemy within your gates."

"The enemy?"

"I call him that. I take the attitude of humility. I've an idea that it's a becoming one. But that isn't my sole reason for taking it. I've somehow got the belief that it may be more successful."

She gave a despairing sigh, and he could not make her eyes meet his own, though the seat he occupied was one of excellent vantage for catching her glance unawares.

"Dear, dear!" she said. "It seems to me that the better I know you the harder you are to understand!"

"Ah, I wish I could conscientiously hold that to be praise! But I'm afraid it's no use trying — although the vague *is* so often the profound."

"So is the jocose, when it springs at you from the midst of something wholly unlike it."

"But I haven't been jocose once this morning — intentionally," he said. He looked down at his rustic, impromptu chair, and added: "Not since I took the stump, as it were."

"And your harangue has certainly been a cloudy

one," she laughed. Their looks did meet, then, for a second, and her laugh seemed to end weakly and tamely to her own ears. There was, besides, a trace of agitation in it which cost her a pang of shame. For inwardly she was in the most turbulent flutter; he had often framed courtly little speeches before, but he had never done so in quite the same voice and with just the same indication of fervor.

"Have I really been so obscure?" he asked. "Well, you're wrong in supposing my opacity resulted from misapplied humor; it must have been entirely owing to an excess of seriousness." His tones had become unmistakably serious as he now spoke, without the least play of that gentle levity which was not always equally pleasing to Isabel.

"Seriousness?" she repeated.

"Yes — I wished to discover something."

"What was it?"

"Whether you really believed that no one had ever wanted to marry you."

She felt the color begin to mount and burn in her face. She was telling herself that it must make her look a foolish fright; but he, meanwhile, was admiring the rosy change it wrought in her.

"I haven't the faintest excuse," she smiled, "for imagining that any one ever did."

"Then you've never given the subject the least consideration?"

"Oh, I don't say *that*! What girl hasn't? It's

so dreadfully necessary that she should! I mean, society makes it so. Perhaps the future woman will look back with wonder and horror on this bigoted nineteenth century, when spinsterhood was always thought to be compulsory (except where the spinster had great wealth) and half ridiculous as well. I'm sure I hope so."

"Not being the future woman," Brockholst said, "you've decided to act with the living present—to endure it, bigotry and all. In other words, to marry somebody. Lucky somebody!" he said, in a lowered voice. Then he quietly rose, and reached her side, and stood there. Isabel never understood how their hands came together, after that. It seemed to her that he held her hand and was tenderly pressing it without having taken it at all. "Won't you tell me the somebody's name? Won't you whisper it?" he asked.

"I can't," she faltered helplessly.

"Then may I tell you the name of the man whom I should like it to be?"

"Yes—if you please . . ."

It was a little after sunset, that evening, when Brockholst and Isabel paused at the latter's doorway. Mrs. Coggeshal chanced to see them from the hall. Sunday evening the family always drank tea and ate cold meat, "preserves" and cake, in place of the week-day six-o'clock dinner. Mrs. Coggeshal now called out to Brockholst a most



cordial invitation for him "to stay and take tea."

But Brockholst, with a smile, called back to the lady, whose hospitality just then struck him as something particularly precious and exquisite, telling her that he had promised himself to his uncle for an hour or two that evening, but that he would almost certainly return later. "I shall then have important business with your father," he added, in a voice which Isabel alone could hear.

She laughed. She was deliciously happy. It had all come with such bewildering suddenness! He had asked her to be his wife, and she loved him with her full heart. There lay enough bliss to drown the whole world in light. It even flooded with its radiance the darkness of her anxiety and hidden fear. For a time at least, she had quite forgotten both.

## XV.

WHEN Brockholst got back to his uncle's house, that same evening, he found waiting there a note that sharply surprised him. It was from Mrs. Bondurant, and ran thus :

"I wish very much to hold a little talk with you this evening. It need not be one that will detain you long, and I promise you that it shall not involve any of those reminiscences which you found distasteful on our last interview. But it is nevertheless very important — and more so to yourself than to me. I shall be alone all the evening, in my accessible little sitting-room, until eleven o'clock. If you grant this request I promise you that it shall be the last of the sort — the last of any sort — which I shall ask you to grant.

"ALMA BONDURANT."

This note affected Brockholst, after he had read it over a second time, with a repugnance for what he held to be sensational mysticism on the part of its writer. As likely as not, he decided, there was behind it all merely the most cool-headed trickery. There were few falsehoods of which as *ruses de guerre* in working out any pet end, he did not believe this woman capable. He soon decided that he would not go to her cottage that evening, or at

any time. Merely meeting her elsewhere was unpleasant. She had doubtless invented some pretext for entering into fresh relations with him. How could he tell whether this pretext were not born of a deliberately reflected scheme or plan from which bitter mischief might afterward accrue? Besides, her very personal nearness was offensive to him; it must always continue a reminder of how pitilessly and vulgarly he had once allowed himself to be duped. And just now he was in too thoroughly contented a mental state for the new jar of such reminder not to prove additionally discordant.

He never found the vagaries and ruminations of old Mr. Chadwick more wearisome than during the next hour or two, and his conscience reproached him more than once through the very force of contrast between this pathetic human decrepitude that still clung to life in so mournfully obstinate a way and the rich joy which had filled his own heart, imagination and temperament. But he certainly felt no pang of conscience in escaping from Carolan, who had never struck him as more apathetic and generally dispirited than while Mr. Chadwick was babbling and maundering to both of them.

It was indeed a blessed relief to break forth upon the roadside, now lit by a softly brilliant moon, and to reach, after a brief walk, the home of Isabel. It seemed as if she had heard his foot

touch the lowest step of the porch, for she unclosed the green-blind doors and met him as he ascended. He could not see her face well; all the light of the inner hall was behind her. As he took her hand (and with what a novel, tender ecstasy of touch his fingers clasped it!) she said:

“I have been talking with papa.” (Her tremulous and dreary tones instantly made him start as he heard them.) “I—I was so happy at what occurred to-day that I *had* to tell him before—before *you* did.”

“Well?”

“He met me so strangely! He—he refuses to even hear of our engagement!”

“Refuses!”

“Yes. I don’t know what it all means! He has been so strange for days and days—and *now*! . . . Oh, I told him that I loved you—that you had made me happy beyond any words. But he simply repeated: ‘No; I can’t hear of it; no . . . no!’—until I grew angry and quitted him. He is there, now, in the study. I have been all alone here for some time; I have been thinking such horrible thoughts! Shortly after you went mamma began to feel wretchedly ill with one of her blinding sick-headaches. There is no use doing any thing with poor mamma at such a time except put her right to bed. I did that, and left her in the dark, upstairs, almost as comfortable as she can possibly be until the attack passes. Then I stole

down to papa. I longed so to have him take me in his arms and kiss me after I had told him about our — about *you!*”

“Yes.”

“Sadie, you know, went this afternoon with Retta Coulter on a three-days’ visit at the house of Mrs. Coulter’s sister, a Mrs. Nevins. All these lower rooms seemed as silent as death while I slipped downstairs. I missed Sadie’s and Clarry’s low voices so, and thought how dreadfully unsympathetic I had been even *sometimes* to have called their love-making monotonous, and like the incessant purring of a large cat . . Oh, how my heart was brimming with the joyful news as I knocked at papa’s door! . . He turned very pale when he had got the real sense of what I had come to tell him. And then he pushed me from him, violently shaking his head. ‘It can’t be,’ were his first words; and though again and again I begged of him his reasons, he gave me none whatever. Perhaps if I had staid there and persisted in questioning him, I might have gained some sort of satisfactory answer. But I grew indignant. I mean, on your account. It all appeared so insulting to *you!* I —”

“Never mind that,” he broke in; and there was a mixture of firmness and feeling in his voice that she seemed to love him all the more for unconsciously showing. “I must see your father at once. Can I?”

"Yes. You know the study well enough, by this time, surely! He's there still."

"You will meet me here when I return?"

"If mamma does not require me. She may. She will ring if the pain becomes terrible, and then I must soothe it by rubbing. That is the only relief she gets, and she gets it from no one half so quickly as from me. But any way I must steal up for a few minutes and see how she is . . . Don't quarrel with papa!" Isabel ended. "That will be worse than useless."

"I shall not," said Brockholst. "But your father may quarrel with me." He touched his forehead meaningly.

"Oh, no, no," murmured Isabel. "You can't think it's *that*!"

"I can think it nothing else," he said. "What sensible objection could he make to our marriage — except that no man is good enough for you? Not that you couldn't marry many and many a worthier one than I am — but none who will guard you, honor you, treasure you more!"

During these same moments Herbert Coggeshal sat brooding in his study. He had been able to give Isabel's proposition but one answer, for he could think of nothing rationally explanatory, he could find no plausible motive for his refusal to let her become Brockholst's wife . . . And now he felt how pitiably insufficient had been that



answer. Of course Isabel would revolt ; no other mode of action could be sensibly expected of her.

*But if he told her everything !*

In the selfishness created by his own intense dread of what Carolan might do, he was now meditating upon just this course of action. Suppose he were to bring on himself the potent humiliation of seeing those lovely, womanly eyes turn horrified with the story of his disgrace. Was not Isabel capable of making any sacrifice to avert Carolan's exposure ? Would her demand for his full renunciation of the false part he had assumed really confront him as inflexibly as his past fears had predicted ? Would not her affection drown the dictates of sterner justice, of abstract and ideal morality ?

But to what base depths had he fallen in even pausing to weigh his own future safety against her self-enforced marriage with a man whom she must despise for his very willingness to contract it on such mean terms ! And if she did preserve her father's degraded honor from the public degradation it merited, what could that father's after-life be except one continual pain of remorse whose pangs would prove worse than any dealt by the open unmasking of his guilt ?

'I must see Carolan once more — to-night, if possible,' thought the wretched Coggeshal, as he sat alone in the silent study, tortured by the new misery that Isabel's confession of her love for

Brockholst had dealt. 'I must see Carolan to-night, to-night,' kept repeating itself through his brain; and yet he did not move, he sat in the one same bowed posture by his desk, chilled with a torpor that seemed half of the body and half of the soul.

He had let days and days go by without visiting Carolan, and yet feeling sure that a final and fateful interview must soon be sought with himself. But it had not been sought. Carolan had remained away. Still he must mean to come, sooner or later, with his cruel requirements. That meeting on the roadside, the other day, had shown him Carolan, it was true, ill-at-ease and almost embarrassed. But this demeanor may merely have been the omen of mischief. The man's entire slow-laid scheme, viewed now by the light his own cold, tersé, hateful admission had shed across it, indicated too plainly that he would push it to but one relentless termination. It was the old story of selling one's self to the devil; there was the reward but there was also the forfeit. And Carolan would unappeasably claim the forfeit.

What if it were not paid? — as it should not be paid! (For now Coggeshal, although he still shrank with all the cowardice of crime from sanctioning Isabel's engagement to Brockholst, had reached in his dark musings that stage of factitious bravery when he could tell his tormented spirit that he would bear the scoffs and jeers of all humanity

rather than let his daughter, loving another man, avert paternal ruin at so frightful a price.) If the forfeit were *not* paid, Carolan could securely enough wreak his revenge. He held those fatally compromising letters; he had said so. It would be easy indeed for him to assert before the world that he had never encouraged the purloining of the dead Arthur Lawton's novel; and even if the world, or a certain more carefully observant part of it, chose to regard him as somewhat of an accomplice, how slight would his fault look beside the one damning evidence of Herbert Coggeshal's name on the title-page of "*Rachel Rand*"!

And yet Coggeshal, if he had really been a man hardened in sin and not one in whom its commission lay isolated as the single ugly blotch on a character otherwise lacking the least deep stain, might have seen more clearly that for Carolan to divulge the secret would be practically to shed social scandal upon himself. But Coggeshal was ill-provided with the calculations of the more ordinary wrongdoer. His crime was like the self-inflicted wound whose red gash stares at a would-be suicide after the mood of madness which caused it has vanished. Its presence in his mind, his life, his conscience, had of late been to him a perpetual source of agonizing bewilderment. The seizure of temptation had passed, and now he marvelled that he could ever have yielded to its clutch. He had never afterward been able coolly to weigh conse-

quences, accurately to examine probabilities. Ever since the first piercing stab of repentance had assailed him he had been wofully expectant of some horrid, exacting penance. With Carolan's threat the ominous tempest had seemed to give its first growl, and ever since then he had crouched waiting, as it were, for the lightning to leap on him with its vengeful bolt.

He had locked his door, this evening, after Isabel had left the study, and now, when a knock at this door sounded, he rose with the idea that she had returned. He unlocked the door, anticipating her presence on its threshold. But instead of this he saw Brockholst pass quietly into the room.

"Good-evening," the latter at once said. He was both polite and tranquil, but without a hint of undue effort to appear either. "I trust I am not disturbing you, Mr. Coggeshal?"

"No."

Brockholst at once seated himself, after having made sure that the door was closed. Coggeshal had given his brief reply in a low, cold tone. He sank into a chair, presently, but not until his visitor had spoken more than one of the several sentences which he now easily and civilly pronounced.

"I have just learned from your daughter something which has surprised and pained me. I will be quite frank with you, and say that I was by no means prepared for it. I will admit that my having asked Miss Isabel to be my wife was one of

those sudden developments of sentiment for which we ourselves are too often not securely forewarned. But the sentiment shall miss neither sincerity nor permanence on that account. I am able to provide comfortably for your daughter — perhaps what some people would term handsomely. She tells me that she returns the attachment I have formed for her, and yet that for no apparent reason she suddenly finds this attachment vetoed by you. I have come here to ask you if there is not a reason on your own side, and to beg that if there be one you will kindly state it.”

Coggeshal answered promptly, but his uneasy eye refused to look into Brockholst’s even for an instant, and his voice was literally hoarse with agitation.

“It is not my wish that Isabel shall marry yet,” he said. He could find nothing more rational and at the same time more comprehensive as explanation. “She is still young. And then I . . . I require her companionship — at least for the present.”

“Excuse me,” returned Brockholst, after a slight pause, during which he had watched the other’s restless hands as they were slid from place to place on the leathern sides of the arm-chair that he was occupying. “You will not necessarily be deprived of your daughter’s companionship through the circumstance of her marriage. Or, if some such result took place, the change might be only a partial one. And, for the rest, you could surely find

consolation, Mr. Coggeshal, in the thought that your daughter was happy with the man of her choice."

This complete self-possession and irreproachable courtesy jarred upon Coggeshal's tense-strung nerves far more than the most defiant challenge would have done. He felt that if Brockholst sat there much longer, with those placid manners, that controlled voice, and (most unendurable of all!) that entire implied attitude of being in the right, hostility, rudeness, insult might come of it. 'I am not responsible for myself,' he thought. 'I shall break down and behave like either madman or fool if I do not somehow get him away.'

And so, instead of answering from the chair into which he had lately dropped, Coggeshal rose first and then began his response while pacing aimlessly about the room, with hands locked behind him.

"I must ask your pardon," he said, "for not pursuing this subject further. It — it is a painful one to me — more painful than I can just now express."

"It promises to become most painful to me also," said Brockholst, with decision; "and yet I must pursue it further."

Coggeshal stopped short in his walk. "Do you mean that you insist upon my continuing our conversation?"

"Most certainly I do insist — until we arrive at a clear mutual understanding."

"Understanding?" Coggeshal muttered, almost



with surliness. "But I have explained my — my objections."

"And in a most unsatisfactory way."

Coggeshal tossed his head a little haughtily.

"Unsatisfactory, no doubt, to *you*!"

"And to your daughter."

"Isabel usually follows my — my counsels."

"Permit me to tell you that even the great affection she bears for you — and I have never known a child to love a father more devotedly than she loves hers — will not command from her, in the present case, blind obedience."

"Ah! you call it blind obedience, then?"

"Yes — I do."

"You — you think I have not the right to forbid her from marriage because she is too young for it?"

"She is not too young to marry. We both know her age. I am sure that the universal custom of civilized races will support me in that humble statement."

Coggeshal looked at him with a gloomy antagonism. "You came here, then, to — to browbeat me into a consent?"

"That is precisely what I did not do," replied Brockholst, with an unmistakable emphasis amid his composure. He now rose as he went on speaking. "I am a man of the world, Mr. Coggeshal, and not a particularly young one, either. I don't boast of it; I've a good deal more reason to deplore it.

Certain facts about myself — worldly facts, let us call them, for want of a neater adjective — are most probably known to you. Your desire to retain Isabel's companionship matrimonially unshared I can both appreciate and sympathize with. But you must acquit me of the least intention to wound or annoy you when I state that such an inclination is one which you no doubt possess in common with many fond parents. That it should stand in the way, however, of your daughter becoming the wife of a man whom she herself is willing to accept as a husband — a man eager and competent to protect her, cherish her, support her — ”

“Enough, sir!” cried Coggeshal, sinking into the chair he had quitted, and waving one hand imperiously before him. “I have told you that I am not disposed to prolong this interview!” The lifted hand had already dropped at his side, but he raised it to his throat as he proceeded to speak, and with a gesture that his extreme pallor made doubly significant . . . And straightway his voice lost the harshness which had gone with that recent brusque interruption; an almost peevishly plaintive strain had entered it as he hurried on: “I — I have no wish to appear arbitrary — ill-mannered. I — I have nothing to say against you, Mr. Brockholst, as — as a lover of Isabel — as her future husband. But I cannot speak further with you now. Perhaps we may talk together at some future time. I — I am not well this evening . . . There!”

he suddenly exclaimed, with a most sickly smile flickering over his pale face for an instant and then dying quite out. "On the plea of — of illness let me postpone the remainder of — of all this till some other time. That — *that*," he finished, as though struggling miserably with each new word, "is my concession. Look at it, if you will, in the light of one."

"I will," said Brockholst, in a voice of patience. He went toward the door and put his hand on its knob. "If I had known that you were unwell," he continued, "I would not have intruded upon you." He at once opened the door and left the room.

'That man is either on the verge of madness,' he said to himself, as he walked out on the porch, 'or —'

He did not finish the reflection; or, rather, he finished it in a way which no written words can make clear. Something in Coggeshal's manner had roused scepticism as regarded this idea of his insanity, after all.

Isabel was not on the porch. He stood there for a little time; the moon was now high enough to glorify the whole land with its airy silver. He passed into the hall again, where a great midsummer moth was dying suicidally with flutters of anguish in the pendent lamp. He took out his watch and saw by the fitfully throbbing light of the lamp that it was almost ten o'clock. He entered the parlor;

it was dim and without occupant. Isabel must be upstairs with her mother. As the extraordinary character of Coggeshal's treatment now returned to him he felt an abrupt conviction that some obstinately baffling mystery lay behind it. He strove to shake off this conviction, and might have done so if the recollection of Mrs. Bondurant's note of summons had not crept into his mind. He failed to see the connection between these two occurrences, and yet one somehow haunted him because of the other. If Isabel had been visible, just then, he might not have yielded to the impulse of finding out why Alma Bondurant had solicited his presence at her cottage. But, as it was, he determined to answer the note in person. He was too much under the spell of our century's rationalism to place the least credence in what is called presentiment: otherwise, perhaps, he would have divined some such weird cause for the attraction by which he now felt himself drawn. After all, he soon decided, as he passed out upon the moonlit road, it was a thoroughly explainable tendency. That note had breathed of tidings curious and as yet occult. So, unquestionably, (unless he were on the edge of a cerebral disorder) had the conduct of Coggeshal breathed!

Beyond Mrs. Bondurant's little garden, with the moon on its tangled heliotropes, he could see the lights of her two sitting-room windows. He had almost a chill of repugnance as he passed up

the short path. Would she throw herself on her knees before him to-night? he ironically asked himself. He was in no position to guess how remote were Mrs. Bondurant's designs, that evening, from any such emotional procedure.

She heard his step on the path, but did not go forth to meet him as once before, not so very long since. Yet she contrived that he should discover her just at the threshold of the sitting-room as he himself reached that of the small, open front door-way.

"So you did come, after all my doubts of you," she said, with a hard gayety in her voice that might have told him, if he had cared to concern himself with its origin, that she had now no further aspirations for a second conquest.

"Were you doubtful on the subject?" he asked, not shaking hands with her as they moved together into the sitting-room. But for that matter, she did not offer him her own hand; she held it ready to put within his at an instant's notice, however, and to make it then appear as if hospitably meeting his half-way.

"I thought you might not care to come," she said. And then she pointed to a bamboo chair near one of the windows, with a little patch of drifted moonlight on the floor below it that gave the effect of some quaint gossamer rug. He took the chair, and she seated herself at some little distance away, near the lamplit table.

"You put your request rather strongly," he replied.

"It was necessary. You would not have come without it—you know that quite well. You detest me; you think me execrable; you can't conceive how you ever held me as even mildly endurable . . . There, you needn't take the trouble to deny it. It's as true as that you are now in love with Isabel Coggeshal."

"Is this the important information that you wanted to give me?" asked Brockholst, with a smouldering sarcasm under his repose.

"Oh, no! But it has . . . well, it has, I should say, something distinctly to do with Isabel, and with the fact of your admiration for her, besides."

At any other time this childish attempt to whet his appetite for hidden news would have made him gently threaten Mrs. Bondurant with immediate departure. But now he saw that except he cultivated a policy of something like moderate tolerance, his visit here might prove totally fruitless.

"Almost any thing that concerns Isabel Coggeshal," he answered, "must be of interest to me . . ."

"Because you are in love with her," his hostess at once struck in, without giving him the chance for another word.

"You seem very anxious to hear me say that I am."

"I want you to admit it,—if you are."

"And why?"



"Because your being so or your not being so concerns my secret."

"Ah! you have a secret, then?"

"My note must have told you that — or something very like it," she responded. Her black eyes glittered in the lamplight balefully (or so he decided) as she now swept his face with them. He had the instinct of danger; he had never so keenly disliked her as now, when she tried to turn, it might be said, a dark-lantern of discovery upon emotions which he would at all times have deemed sacred from her scrutiny; he longed to pass out of the chamber, quitting all the strategic falsity which her very countenance suggested to him, and meeting once more the sweet candor of the summer moonlight beyond. But longing like this was of no use; she held him, for the present, by a much stronger bond than mere curiosity.

"And you will not reveal your secret unless I make it plain to you that I am or am not in love with Miss Coggeshal?" Brockholst here slowly said.

She laughed, and the laugh sounded like discord to her hearer, though another might have thought it musical. "Oh, you are so frightfully downright; you're like a lawyer at a cross-examination. I thought you would take my hint properly. Do be *bon enfant*; I assure you I am playing no unfriendly part; I'm playing just the opposite of an unfriendly part."

"And your playing it depends upon that one piece of knowledge?"

"You will see when you've answered me."

"Do you mean when I've answered you in the affirmative?"

She shook her head with a very doubtful smile. "I'm afraid I shouldn't believe you *unless* you answered in the affirmative."

"What makes you so certain that I am in love with Isabel Coggeshal?"

She leaned back a little in her chair and half closed her eyes for a moment. "I've seen you two together. I knew your look — I recognized it. It took me back ten years."

He gave an irritated movement. "It's a very different feeling from that one!" he exclaimed, and then stopped short, as if chagrined for having made so much of a positive admission.

"There!" she cried softly, changing her posture in a trice. "You admit, then, that you *are* in love!"

He paused before replying, but the pause was brief. "I don't see the slightest earthly reason for denying or prevaricating about the matter," he said, suddenly, but with the coldness of dislike in his voice. "I do care for Isabel, as I have never cared for any other woman in my life. I mean to marry her, too. I mean to marry her because she is willing to marry me: I hope that fully satisfies you."

Mrs. Bondurant drooped her head. She was inwardly very triumphant, very exultant; but now, as she slowly raised her head, the face that she revealed to Brockholst would perhaps have seemed full of genuine regret, and even of sorrow as well, to any one except the man who now observed it.

"I hope," she said, "you will not think me insincere when I tell you how sad those words make me feel. I was sure of your being fond of the girl; I did not know (how should I have known?) that there was yet anything like an engagement."

Brockholst sat perfectly silent. He was watching her with the intensest scrutiny, but he was resolved to make no immediate reply.

Mrs. Bondurant reached out her hand and took a book from the table near which she was seated. She felt the keenness of a gratified revenge as she did so. It was a sensation that her brain was quite small enough and her nerves, for all their apparent sensitiveness of a certain sort, just coarse enough to enjoy. She opened the book in her lap, and looked down into it.

"Have you read this novel by Isabel's father?" she asked.

"I have read one or two of his novels. To which of them do you refer?"

"This — 'Rachel Rand.'"

"'Rachel Rand'?" he said, already wondering whither this new train of talk would possibly lead.

"No; I haven't read that yet. I have been intending to do so for quite a little age." And then it occurred to him that she was deliberately avoiding the one subject on which any remark of hers could be of the least worth. "Excuse me," he pursued, "but we were speaking —"

"Of this book," she interrupted. She rapped with one hand against a page of it as she spoke. Then she fixed her eyes upon his face. "I thought," she added, "that you had not read it. No — let me say that I was perfectly certain you had not read it."

"Why?" he inquired.

She drew a long sigh. "Because it is, in many of its chapters, an almost exact account of just what passed between you and myself, in Paris, years ago."

"Ah?" he said, in a tone of such mingled indifference and satire that his listener felt the hidden forces of her spite quicken with a new vitality. "The parallel is of course accidental. History repeats itself."

"Not in this way." She rose, and put forward the open book, offering it to him. Her voice, as she went on speaking, took a vibration, a thrill of earnestness, that made it seem almost not her own. "Read the title-page, which bears Herbert Coggeshal's name. Then read here and there in the story itself, and then tell me, Lloyd Brockholst, if you care to do so, *who wrote* 'Rachel Rand.'"

By this time she had given him the book. He advanced with it toward the light. She had re-seated herself. She saw him read the title-page, and then turn to the initial leaf of the narrative. She was having, now, the first actual exquisite throe of her revenge.

He read several consecutive pages. He had changed color a little — or was this a fancy? The rose-tinted shade of the lamp prevented her from securely judging. But he had not given a single start as yet. That was strange, certainly. He now re-opened the volume at about its middle portion. He read a page or two there. Then he passed to the final leaves, and turned these over, somewhat hastily. Next he closed the book altogether and tossed it upon the table.

After that he looked at her. She did not understand his look at all. It flurried and amazed her.

“Well?” she questioned.

“Well?” he said composedly.

“You know the truth *now!*”

“What truth?” he replied.

She sprang to her feet, quivering. “What truth!” she exclaimed, almost savagely, in her anger at his collected bearing. “Why, that Herbert Coggeshal never wrote that book at all! That *you* wrote it — every word of it — except the names of the characters, which *he* altered!”

Brockholst heard her with the manner of some one who had listened to the most ordinary kind of

language. He slowly advanced toward her as she finished.

"Who told you this?" he asked.

His calm question made her black eyes flash and her cheek redden. "Who told me?" she began heatedly. "Why, the *book* told me."

"Carolán told you," he said.

"Well," she cried, "and if he did! I knew it before that! I—"

"Pardon me . . . but how could Carolán have known it?"

She looked at him with a measuring, astounded, scornful glance, from head to foot, and burst into a laugh of mockery.

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed. "Is it possible that you are going to *deny* you wrote the book?"

Just before he answered her she saw, now that the light on his face was altered, how pale he had really grown during these last few minutes. But another change had come upon his face, setting there a gravity, a dignity, a firmness, a manliness, that she had never so plainly witnessed in it until then.

"I do deny that I wrote the book," he said.

"You—you can't!" she gasped, receding from him.

"But I do," he persisted, letting his gaze dwell on hers with a steady glow where it almost seemed that ice and fire met. "I do deny it, and I think



neither you nor Carolan can prove that I am not stating the truth. If you can, tell me how."

She sank back into her chair, clenching her hands together and staring up at him in a dazed way. She knew that he was uttering a falsehood, but as he uttered it, in this wholly serene and resolute voice, her petted and plotted revenge appeared crumbling to ashes before her very sight!

## XVI.

WHEN Brockholst had departed from the study, Coggeshal fell to pacing its floor again. Shame stung him as he thought of the feebleness with which he had behaved to his late guest. Yet he had been powerless to act differently. The thought of how this man, of all others, would scorn him if he learned the very motive which he had come to discover, was almost paralyzing in its mortification. Brockholst appealed to him as just the sort of husband he would have delighted in for Isabel. Of fine mental breadth, admirably cultivated, possessing high social prominence, endowed with considerable wealth, and still young if not absolutely youthful, Brockholst stood as much for the delectable, ideal son-in-law as Clarry Coulter misrepresented him. No wonder, bitterly meditated Coggeshal, that this rebuff had astonished the man. And how many men of just his place in the world would have shown indignation and vanity to excess if treated thus by the father of the girl they loved — especially when that father was a scribbler for his bread in a little house at High Bridge?

Thus, at least, Coggeshal now tormentedly mused. He had never liked Brockholst so greatly as when the latter made his quiet and graceful exit from the study that evening. It seemed that with every exasperating excuse to conduct himself otherwise, he had remained an almost unrivalled gentleman.

The desire to see Carolan was now stronger in Coggeshal's breast than ever. He left the study about ten minutes after Brockholst had left the house. Isabel was still absent from the lower hall, and from any of its adjacent rooms. The truth was that her mother's headache had reached a veritable crisis of pain, and that Isabel was using with the poor, half-blinded sufferer that mode of remedy which we have heard her mention to Brockholst.

Coggeshal passed down upon the moonlit road. The Chadwick abode rose but a few steps away. As he paused before it he saw a figure which he instantly recognized as Carolan.

"I came to look for you," he said.

Carolan gave a short nod. "Suppose we go inside," was his reply.

He conducted Coggeshal at once to the library, on the ground-floor of the house. "You don't smoke, I believe," he said, presently, after turning up the light and offering his companion a comfortable chair.

Coggeshal sank into the chair, but made him no

answer. He sat for some time staring straight down at the carpet, as if one of the vivid arabesques he found there had oddly fascinated him. Carolan meanwhile nonchalantly — a little swaggeringly, perhaps — lit a cigar and strolled about the room, with his hands in his pockets. At length he paused quite close to where Coggeshal sat. As he did so, Coggeshal raised his head, and sweeping a glance right and left, said :

“Is this quite private?”

“Oh, yes,” was the answer; “quite.”

“Where is . . Brockholst?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure.”

“He hasn’t returned yet?”

“Returned from where?”

“He was at my house a little while ago,” said Coggeshal sombrely. “He came to have a talk with me — a talk of special meaning. You can probably guess what meaning.”

“I?” said Carolan coldly. “How should I?”

“This is a small place; people’s doings are noticed in it. Brockholst and Isabel have been a good deal together, of late. I thought you might have suspected —”

“Good God!” Carolan broke in, springing toward him, and hurling his lighted cigar at a cuspedor, which it missed, with a little turmoil of sparks on the grate below. “I never did more than half suspect it! And it’s true, then? — true? He wants to marry Isabel? He?”

“Yes.”

“And what does *she* say?” asked Carolan, with a swift wildness. Then he made a contemptuous gesture, walking away. “But of course she accepts him. A fellow like that! Show me the girl who would refuse him!” Here he suddenly wheeled round, facing Coggeshal with a most stern aspect. “But the whole thing would be simply horrible,” he went on.

“Ah,” said Coggeshal, with great bitterness, and entirely misinterpreting these last words, as it was only natural he should do, “I am prepared to have you present decisive objections. Don’t imagine that you surprise me.”

“I could surprise you, if I chose,” Carolan muttered, his voice low and yet plainly audible. Coggeshal looked at him with a glance of dreary inquiry which he might have put into words if the speaker had not at once continued: “This match *can* not take place, and Lloyd Brockholst would be the first to say so, I believe, could he know the actual facts.”

“And you’ll tell them, of course, if I don’t forbid the marriage,” Coggeshal replied, with a forlorn sneer on his pale, wearied face.

“*I* tell them!” echoed Carolan. He looked fixedly into the other’s eyes, for a moment. “I almost forgot,” he said, “how little of the real truth you know. Ah, Coggeshal,” he proceeded, with a shake of the head which had in it an

element of grisly comedy because of the lamentation it conveyed at the loss of a vicious and malevolent power, "you can't imagine how matters have changed since you and I parted, that evening, a few weeks ago."

"Matters have changed?" repeated Coggeshal. "How changed?"

"Have you had no suspicion of any thing new having occurred?"

"Oh, I thought you might perhaps be plotting some new devilry."

"Thanks. You're scarcely in your most amiable mood this evening. I have remained away from your house for a number of weeks, have I not?"

"Yes."

"Well — I've been waiting for something."

"For what?" queried Coggeshal, with an intonation of profound scorn. "For me to write and tell you that Isabel was already nicely and properly frightened into a consent to marry you?"

"Pshaw," retorted Carolan, with cutting fierceness; "I should never have waited for it. It would have been so much more entertaining to have arranged all that without your help."

"Ah," said Coggeshal; "then you have had other reasons for your delay. Is that your meaning?"

"Decidedly it is."

"You puzzle me, I confess."

Carolan threw himself into an easy-chair just



opposite Coggeshal. "Of course I puzzle you. Look here, my friend. You came to me this evening. Why did you come? Shall I inform you why?"

"You can, if you please."

"I will. It was for this reason: You wanted to ask me how I intended to act in case you sanctioned this engagement between Brockholst and Isabel. My dear friend, I shan't act at all. I shall do nothing. Do you understand? Nothing."

Coggeshal smiled in a forced, goaded way. "You've something behind all this, I suppose. You laid your plans too adroitly in the beginning—you played the tempter too energetically then, to retire harmless now. I should like to believe it of you—God knows I should! But I can't. It's taking too human a view of you, altogether. It's giving you credit for both a mercy and a manliness that you've shown me you don't possess."

"That's plain talk—from the author of 'Rachel Rand,'" sneered Carolan.

"I want plain talk," exclaimed Coggeshal. "I came here to give it and to get it."

"Ah . . . you did?"

"Yes! You've driven me into a hole. You've placed me in the most despicable of positions. You've turned me almost into a madman. It isn't that I could not and would not bear any punishment my own fault might inflict on *myself*. But the fearful part of what you've forced me to en-

ture is my desolation of some one else's happiness — and that some one my own daughter! There you've shown a villany, Carolan, beyond mine. I admit my villany to have *been* such. But —”

“Stop, if you please,” Carolan broke in at this point. “Look at me as I am, not as I was. There's a monstrous gulf of difference. What have I just said to you? That my present attitude is one of nullity. I don't oppose this marriage. Let it take place. I shan't interfere. Circumstance may, however.”

“Circumstance?”

“Yes. And oh, such a slight one! I've been expecting it for a good many days. It's involved in the merest accidental turn of affairs. I'm not clear to you, eh? No, I fancied I would not be. But Brockholst can't marry your daughter. I'll hold my peace, Coggeshal. I'll never state who wrote that book. But somebody will and can — when he reads it. He hasn't even glanced at it yet. But he must do so soon. That's what I mean by an ‘accidental’ turn of affairs.”

Coggeshal rose from his chair, visibly trembling. “Arthur Lawton wrote the book,” he said huskily. “A dead man wrote it. Was — was Brockholst a friend of his?”

“Oh, no.”

“Then what is all this — this flourish of words? Answer me.”

"Suppose that Brockholst himself wrote the book — years ago," said Carolan.

"*Suppose!*" Coggeshal cried. He clutched the back of the chair from which he had just risen. "I'll suppose no such absurd thing!"

"Oh, you won't," murmured Carolan, with what struck his hearer as an infernal nonchalance. "Then that settles the matter."

A fire of passion seemed to replace Coggeshal's temporary weakness. He hurried to Carolan's side. His eyes were flashing. "Did Brockholst write 'Rachel Rand'?" he exclaimed, gasping the words.

"Yes — he wrote every line of it," said Carolan, looking up into that pallid, twitching, tragically perturbed face.

"You liar!" said Coggeshal, catching at his arm where he sat. But Carolan leapt up on the instant.

"None of that, Coggeshal, if you please!" He shook himself free while he spoke, and receded.

Coggeshal, with both hands clenched, again rushed close to him. "Is this true? You must have known, then!"

"I didn't know — till lately."

"You told me Arthur Lawton wrote it — a dead man."

"I believed so."

"You say Brockholst hasn't even read it since it was published."

"But he wrote it — years ago."

"What proof have you for saying this?"

"Brockholst's own words . . Don't look so demented, Coggeshal. The thing was a thunderbolt to me, just as it is to you. But it didn't unseat my reason; I hope it won't do that to yours. Listen. Brockholst told me one night, here in this very room, that he had written a novel called 'Marian Moore' while stopping at his uncle's house in town, and had given it to Chadwick to read — tossed it carelessly away, in fact, forgetting and ignoring it."

"Yes . . go on."

"Don't devour me with those eyes, please — and don't keep grasping at my arm. It may amuse *you*, but it's deucedly unpleasant to *me* . . Yes, Brockholst is the author. It was his manuscript. He hasn't seen 'Rachel Rand' yet. He hasn't happened to see it. But he will. Of course he will, sooner or later."

"And . . you told me, Carolan, that . . that Arthur Lawton was surely the author; you said you'd even seen his letter to Mr. Chadwick!" Beads of sweat were now thick on Coggeshal's forehead; he stood so close to Carolan that the heat of his breath struck like air from flame on the latter's face.

"You're acting like a fool!" said Carolan, drawing back. "You —"

"Scamp that you are!" shot from Coggeshal.

So *this is why* you kept from fulfilling your threat !  
You devil ! ”

He sprang, the next instant, at Carolan's throat. His strength was not that of the man he attacked, but there was a murderous desperation in him that gave him tremendous transient force. Carolan fell beneath him, taken unawares, and in so falling sustained a sharp blow on one temple from the heavy oaken leg of a large arm-chair. Instant unconsciousness was the result of this contusion. Carolan lay as dead under the glaring eyes of his assailant.

‘It may have killed him,’ thought Coggeshal, standing over the inert shape. The torture of Carolan's late revelation, and the sudden, dizzying belief that his foe's death was perhaps added to his hateful previous crime, gave Coggeshal, in his agonized, maddened state, the impulse of suicide. The nearness of High Bridge darted upon him as a possibility of ending all his anguish. He rushed from the room, and soon had quitted the house. He would leap from the Bridge. There was no other course to take. It would save Isabel — it would fitly end so despicable a life as his own ! . .

He hurried wildly along the moonlit road. The desire to die was dominant and imperative with him. As he hastened on he saw a figure advancing toward him. But he failed to notice, in his turbulent excitement, whose figure it was.

Brockholst was returning from Mrs. Bondurant's

cottage, and saw him, recognizing him, starting back aghast at the wretched desperation which one fleet glimpse of his face conveyed. For a moment Brockholst stood still, observant of the shape that had hurried past him. Then he followed it.



## XVII.

HIGH BRIDGE loomed picturesque and massively beautiful under the midsummer moon. Intense stillness reigned, not alone on the great solid span of masonry itself, but among all its various and pleasant approaches.

Brockholst had clearly seen Coggeshal strike forth upon the bridge. He quickened his pace when sure that this impression had not been illusory. Coggeshal's form was soon quite distinct to him in the moonlight. It fled along until about the centre of the Bridge was reached. Then it halted.

Brockholst halted too. He knew that he was now so near Coggeshal as to make the discovery of his presence inevitable should the man chance to turn in his own direction. But Coggeshal did not turn. He stood leaning over the low yet secure barrier, gazing upon the silvered lapse of stream below.

This was a supreme hour with him. He seemed to have withdrawn from his own life, and to be looking at its ruin. What foundations of resolve he had laid, what walls of principle he had builded,

what spires of purpose he had reared! And now what debasement and overthrow it had all become! Death had often enough wakened his awe, but he had never been a man to greatly fear it. He had clung to his earthly days because they had brought him the hope of gratifying a literary ambition. But now death was like the beckoning of a sweet, dusky hand,—like the promise of a priceless relief. Besides, there was more mercy to his family, he had rapidly decided, in his dying than living. The shame of his suicide would not equal in any way the shame of his exposure as a thief and swindler. And Lloyd Brockholst might hold his peace, then; surely at Isabel's appeal he would do so, even if the sin of her father should forever part them. Perhaps, too, Bourke Carolan was now lying dead there in Mr. Chadwick's library. And as the thought entered his mind that this was probably true, Coggeshal felt no pang of remorse, but rather a fierce exultation, a delirious and vengeful joy. The raging tumult in his soul was not yet calm enough for horror to steal its cold clasp about his heart. That must come later, when his terrible present excitement had left him. But would he then be among breathing mortals at all? Certainly there was no evidence of this in the set, colorless face on which the moon was now shining. The determination to die had set its seal there. Between himself and the height from which he had willed to leap rose the sturdy railing

that verged the bridge on either side. This he prepared to scale; it was low, and easy to clear. But while he put himself in the attitude of surmounting it and of reaching the giddy ledge just beyond, death, as a realization, a contact, an almost tangible presence and influence, wrought in him an unforeseen change. He was chilled, though not by physical fear. To live on, stained and degraded, an outcast and a criminal, remained for him detestable, unendurable. But the recollection of Carolan, slain through the consequences of his own assault, now smote him with a fearful pang. If the man were dead at this moment, he had been murdered, and himself, Herbert Coggeshal, was his murderer. That spring at Carolan's throat, futile though it might have become, had nevertheless been stimulated by a single assassinating motive. The wish to kill had fired him, swayed him, mastered him. And he was about to dash himself, with perhaps a new and hideous crime on his soul, — whither? He did not know; he had never pretended to know. Like so many men of intellect who hold no religious creed, he had neither denied nor asserted a future immortality. But in this pause before the perpetration of his self-destructive act, the tender moonlight seemed to grow ghastly with omen, and the dark slopes of foliage to lift black arms of threat. He had never been so human as at this dread time when he believed himself to be possibly steeped in the worst sort

of guilt, when the world of men was receding from him, when the very breath of eternity seemed to blow upon his haggard face. It was now with his nature as if every thrill of pity that he had ever known since boyhood for the sufferings of his own kind were repeated in tenfold its former stress, and as if each were related to a sole object — unspeakable commiseration and regret for the man whom he had left prostrate and aidless! To have been sure that Carolan was living would have made his intended suicide a happiness by contrast with the despair in which it was now clad. His grasp upon the railing relaxed. He drew back, staggering, from the misty abyss into which he had gazed.

‘To hurl myself to God,’ he thought, ‘fresh from the killing of a fellow-creature . . . No, I cannot!’

But immediately the revulsion came. He remembered all that would await him if he should still live on — the hateful publicity, the glaring ignominy, contempt, ridicule. There would be at least a kind of dignity in dying as he had meant to die. If he staid to think, to reflect, he would only feel this growing cowardice. And then would come untold humiliation afterward. Better end the abhorred possibility of that. One big effort of the will, and all was over. It was just to vault that railing, to stand for a second on the clean-cut stone, at its further side, and to make the downward plunge!

He darted back to his former place. He flung one leg across the barrier. In another minute he would have passed it. But during that minute a form sped toward him, and a pair of strong arms wrapped themselves around his body. In a trice, as it seemed to him, he was on the solid flooring of the Bridge again. The pressure of those binding arms had relaxed, but he had fallen, (still within their clasp, which now had caught him at either shoulder) having been tripped supine by a swift trick of the wrestler's art. Past excitement had so weakened him that he could scarcely answer with more than one or two feebly resistant struggles. And then he saw a firm face bent above him, recognizing it and shuddering as he did so.

"Lloyd Brockholst," he said faintly; "it's you! It's you of all men on earth!"

"Yes — it's I," was the answer.

"You know about it all, I suppose. . You've come here to kill me? Well, I don't blame you."

"I've come here, through some lucky chance, to save you. Good God, man, you meant to leap off this bridge! Don't deny it — I saw it in your face just now."

"Yes."

"Look here, Coggeshal," said Brockholst, with intensity of meaning but in tones that were well below the ordinary pitch. "I'm a good deal stronger than you are, and I can keep you here

all night if I choose. And I'll do it, too, unless you swear to me that you will walk home peaceably at my side."

"But you . . you know about that book," faltered Coggeshal, looking up at his captor with eyes that sent a thrill to Brockholst's heart; they reminded him, there in the moonlight, so much of Isabel's. "No," the fallen man went on, with a sob breaking his next words, "you — you can't have learned yet."

"I know the whole story," said Brockholst. He set his lips together fiercely, for a second or two. "Damn the book!" he continued. "Who cares for it? We'll talk of it, later, if you please. What I want now is your promise to take my arm and come home properly. Will you give me your oath to that effect before I let you up? I'll keep you here till somebody comes, Coggeshal — on my word, I will — if you *don't* promise. I'll keep you here, if I have to wait hours . . Now, what do you say?"

"I will go with you," murmured Coggeshal, after a little silence. "I promise."

Brockholst released him. Coggeshal rose with difficulty and took the arm proffered him as though he more than half needed its support. He suddenly turned toward Coggeshal as they walked along together in the moonlight.

"You — you said you'd learned about the book, Brockholst, and yet you . . you treat me like this?"



It is so strange! You must despise me past all power of words."

"I despise what you *did*."

"No idea was further from my mind (as God may be listening now!) than that the book was yours!"

"You mean at the time you put your name to it."

"Yes. And I *don't* mean to offer this fact as the least excuse for my fault."

"It would not be one," said Brockholst, with inflexible gravity. "I knew, however, that you believed it written by a dead man — by some one called Arthur Lawton."

These words, though used with no subtle effect of scorn or satire, were to him who listened like so many thrusts of a dagger. He made a withdrawing movement of his hand as it rested in Brockholst's arm; but the latter at once restrained him from freeing the hand altogether. "Remember your promise," he said, with sternness, at the same time.

"It was not that," responded Coggeshal huskily. "I did not think of breaking my promise . . . You're right. I robbed the dead — in spirit, at least. That man, Carolan, was to blame for my believing the Arthur Lawton story."

"Carolan has been as much to blame all through as you have been," cried Brockholst, with a great deal more sign of inward agitation than he had

yet revealed. "And when one thinks of his motive — pah! It was sickening!"

"But *you!* — how *could* you have learned all these details?" questioned Coggeshal. "What wizardry has helped you to them? Surely Carolan —"

"Carolan has not told me anything," Brockholst broke in. "Never mind my source of information. It wasn't at all a supernatural one, I assure you."

They had now left the Bridge, and were curving their course past the high-service tower that stands at its western end, dark against the luminous heavens, now, in its graceful and delicate-tipped slenderness.

"You've caught me back from the very boundary-line of death, Brockholst," Coggeshal here said. "When I first looked into your face and heard the sound of your voice I — I hated you for doing me that most undesired favor. But something in your manner, your treatment, since then, has touched me unutterably — has made me dream, fancy, surmise, that you whose pardon alone I could value, are, of all men, capable to — to extend it . . . Ah, I don't say *now*; but hereafter, perhaps. Yet a full restitution will be only just. It will not be necessary for you to demand this of me. I will give it unhesitatingly." He bowed his head, then, and a shiver ran through his frame. "It will torture me, and I may feel like rushing again toward the death from which you snatched

me. Not that the punishment will not be fair enough. But to droop under the slow, heavy yoke of it for years! A prison could be no worse . . . A prison!" he broke off, with a laugh so hollow and wretched that it seemed to echo an infinitude of pain. "What am I saying?" He stopped on the roadside which they had now reached, and Brockholst let him disengage his hand from the arm which had thus far firmly retained it. "Oh, my God! worse than a prison may be waiting me! This evening, for the first time, I heard from Carolan that *you* wrote 'Rachel Rand.' And then, realizing how he had lied to me, I—I dashed myself upon him—I wanted to kill him. He's stronger far than I, no doubt, but my attack surprised him—he fell—and in falling his head struck somewhere, so that he lost consciousness. I left him senseless—I told myself that it was better such a villain *were* dead. Perhaps the blow killed him. If so, crime has begotten crime. He tempted me—but how piteous is that for an excuse!"

"You left him senseless, you say?" Brockholst now replied. This account had undoubtedly dealt its due shock, but he had already steeled his nerves, and moreover he was never the man to let dismay too visibly control him.

"Yes, he lay as if dead," exclaimed Coggeshal. "I think that he was dead. As I told you, I wanted him dead! The truth, when I heard it from his

lips, made me like a mad being." The next instant he burst into tears, hiding his face with both hands. His form swayed so in its tremors that Brockholst feared he would fall. He threw one arm about the miserable sufferer's neck and put his lips so close to Coggeshal's ear that they almost touched it.

"The chances are that you *haven't* killed Carolan," he said. "Come with me at once to my uncle's, and we will see. A mere fall such as you described might have stunned him only a few minutes. And now . . . as to that other matter. I don't know what I would have done, Herbert Coggeshal, if you had been any one else except the man you are. I mean this in two ways. I have seen something of you during the past few weeks, and I can't but feel that there is thrice as much good in you as there is bad. You're one of the bitterest examples, I think, that human nature can possibly give of error: you went wrong with a moral, an intellectual light pointing for you to go otherwise. If you had been ignorant, or even moderately cultured, the stooping to such an hypocrisy would have struck me as far less unfortunate. But there is no charge I can make against you which your own sense of right has perhaps not made already. That is the sadly self-contradictory part of your whole distressing action, and the element of wilful baseness which I detect there *might* have made me very unpitying. But I am quite the opposite from unpitying—or at least from

practically appearing so. Let me explain to you why, if you have not guessed why already. I can do this in one word, and that word is your daughter's name. That word is — Isabel!" . . .

## XVIII.

A FEW minutes later, Brockholst and Coggeshal entered the house of Mr. Chadwick. The front-door had been closed, as if for the night, and Brockholst had used his latch-key. The hall was still lighted. Coggeshal's agitation had not yet passed. He clung to his companion's arm in almost a desperate state of trepidation as they moved together toward the library.

"It—it is lighted," Coggeshal gasped. "All will be just as we left it—the servants have not heard any thing—he will be lying there on the floor, just as when . . ."

Carolan now quietly appeared in the doorway of the library.

As Coggeshal recognized him a moan of supreme thankfulness sounded from his lips. But this one spasm of joy shattered the already strained mind that weeks of torment had cursed before this luridly eventful night.

He reeled forward, and Brockholst caught him as he was falling. His face was colorless and his eyes were closed when Brockholst laid him upon a sofa in the library, for a time forgetting the



presence of Carolan while he bent above Isabel's father. But suddenly he remembered it, and turned, saying:

"Ring for a servant, please. There must be a doctor got here at once. It looks to me as if Mr. Coggeshal were very ill."

"Ring yourself, if you choose," retorted Carolan. "I'll perform no services for that man — not even if he's dying. He —" But Carolan paused there, as he walked toward the further end of the library.

Brockholst hurried to the bell and rang several sharp peals on it. As he did so he said, in a voice very different from any that his present listener had ever heard him use before:

"You can be perfectly outspoken with *me*, Carolan. I know how he assaulted you, and though I'm thankful enough you were not killed, I think you merited some kind of stringent punishment."

"For what?" exclaimed Carolan, with a quick step or two in the direction of the late speaker.

"Bah!" said Brockholst, contemptuously. He turned and stooped again over Coggeshal, lifting one of the limp, chill hands that hung nearly touching the floor.

"For what?" repeated Carolan, coming much closer to where Brockholst stood.

The latter rose and turned once more, facing Carolan. His voice was low but very clear, and the look in his eyes had great firmness mixed with disdain.

“You’re perfectly aware for what, Carolan. This is a time to strip off all disguises with *me*. I saw your friend, Mrs. Bondurant, this evening; she has rather played you false, I should imagine, in a certain confidence you made her. There’s no excuse for Coggeshal, but there’s none for you, either. You wanted to put this man in your power for a certain most dishonorable reason, and you coolly did it. You may not have known I was the author of that manuscript, but you had no doubts that the dead Arthur Lawton never wrote a line of it. And in telling Coggeshal that he did write it you spoke a cold-blooded falsehood . . . Now, mark my words, Carolan,” Brockholst went on, with a clouding face, “I deny that I wrote the book. I have denied it to-night to Mrs. Bondurant, and I shall continue to deny it before the whole world, if necessary. As for yourself, you had best take my denial as a mercy. I don’t mean it so to *you*, but I mean it so to others. If you shout the truth from the house-tops I shall see very clearly how to deal with you afterward. I’ll press the whole matter against you in a legal way, and I’ll have such facts wrung from you on a cross-examination by the cleverest lawyers I can procure that in your endeavor to take away some one else’s character you’ll not escape without your own in shreds.”

Carolan was pale with wrath and consternation as these words came to an end. The blow from his fall (which had not only temporarily stunned

him but had left him with a pain and a mental confusion that days were yet needed to cure) made his reply far less circumspect and controlled than it might under other circumstances have been. He sank into a chair, pressing one hand against the injured and aching portion of his head, and cried with a savage directness:

“Yes! I see, Lloyd Brockholst! You’ll save the father of the girl you’re in love with. I cared for her, too. Perhaps if I’d had your money she would have made it much plainer sailing for me. . Very well; if you choose to drag the thing into the courts, so will I. Tear my character into shreds, if you please. I’ll go away in its tatters for the sake of the satisfaction I get by proving Coggeshal a thief!”

But this was a mere threat in the air — a sputter of angry bravado. Something in the very tone by which it was accompanied caused Brockholst to more than suspect so, as he now re-concerned himself with the man lying so still and white there on the sofa. Besides, he had long ago measured the nature of Carolan. Vanity swayed him too strongly for ruin of self to be sought at the price of any secured vengeance, however delightful.

The physician who came, that night, after a good deal of inevitable delay, found Coggeshal most critically ill. He had recovered, by this time, a kind of drowsy consciousness, but the evidences of cerebral paralysis were soon sadly assertive

The right side of his body had become almost wholly torpid, and his attempts to speak were only mumbling incoherence.

Brockholst, when the serious character of this seizure was made known to him, felt as if he were wronging Isabel by every minute that he kept her in ignorance of it. Carolan had now quitted the library, his exit taking place some time before the appearance of the physician. Brockholst left Coggeshal in the latter's care, and crossed the little interval between the two houses. He found Isabel in the lower hall; her mother had fallen into a blessedly relieving slumber, and she had descended to learn if the interview between her lover and her father were yet over, when the absence of both had roused her surprise.

Brockholst told her the mournful news with all the care he could employ, but no amount of charitable circumlocution could lessen the sting of its pain when at last it had to be delivered. We can first show the sword, in these cases, as well-sheathed as may be; but to deal the stab is perforce to denude the blade.

"Taken suddenly ill — papa?" she said, with a quiver and a fall in her voice. "Dangerously, you think? Oh, where is he?" And then she clung with both hands to Brockholst's arm, and a vague self-reproach passed through her breast; for only a short time ago she would have been more alarmed and hurt by news of this sort con-

cerning her father than if it had related to any one else in the world. And now there was another — dearer, as her heart had already made her sure, than he had ever been or could ever be!

“I have thought for some time,” she went on, with the lines of worryment and dread beginning about her tremulous mouth, “that papa might be threatened by a paralytic stroke. Tell me — is it any thing like that? Don’t keep it from me if you really think so!”

He told her, as they hurried arm-in-arm out into the moonlight, that there could be very little doubt as to a severe paralysis. This gave him a melancholy but divine excuse for stopping at his uncle’s door-step and kissing her again and again, with entreaties that she would be brave for just a little while longer, until she had seen her father and they had got him home. Poor Isabel cried very weakly indeed on her lover’s shoulder, for answer, during several good minutes; but she nevertheless felt his method of stimulating her courage to be a most wise and efficient one. . .

Herbert Coggeshal never regained a more than precarious health. His mind acquired a certain lucidity, but it was always of a blurred and vaporous kind at best. The calamity seemed more horrible to Isabel, when it first occurred, than to either her mother or Sadie; for Mrs. Coggeshal’s grief was almost forgotten in the new opportunity



offered her for a hundred tender ministrations, and for blending her wifely affection with compassion instead of awe. As for Sadie, although she never liked her father so much as now, in his infantile meekness and helplessness, the postponement of the wedding was nevertheless a very absorbing affair to her; and besides, Sadie had been greatly affronted by Isabel, for perhaps the thousandth time in both their lives, through a careless remark the latter had made with respect to their father's illness. "Oh, you needn't bother yourself about coming into the sick-room at all," Isabel had said; "papa misses me when I'm not there, and we've always been so incessantly together that of course I'm everything to him now." She regretted the words after they were spoken, and saw that they had been most infelicitously put. But there was no unsaying them, although she had really meant them with no more mischievous intent than to show Sadie that she and her treasured Clarry need not feel in the least alienated from each other's company by the family misfortune. But Sadie had hidden a wound under a resigned smile ever since; she had cloaked with the most dove-like amiability what in anyone else would have passed for insupportable sulkiness; and very probably this industrious nursing of her cruel indignity may also have contributed to the general alleviation of her grief.

A sudden event changed the whole current of



Isabel's feeling as regarded her father's disaster. Brockholst had told her nothing of the real reason for it. He had no fear that Carolan would do so, and had coldly and summarily advised the secretary of his uncle to seek some other means of employment.

"If you don't go, Mr. Carolan," he had said, "I will tell my uncle that you and I cannot live beneath his roof, and that he must choose between us. I think that I know just how Mr. Chadwick will choose. Whimsical and tiresome he may often be, yet you have not exhibited toward him, for several weeks past, anything except a reluctant and rather sullen bearing. He has complained more than once to me of your conduct, recently. You have only to inform me at your leisure that you will quietly leave within three days' time. On your doing so I will hand or send you an amount equivalent to your salary for three months from the present date. So please decide as you think best."

"I decide now!" Carolan had retorted fiercely. "I'll go, but I'll never accept a dime from you except what is my due. I want no hush-money for keeping back the plain truth. When I leave this house and go back to journalism, my pen will be my own, sir—pray tax yourself to remember that—and I shall use it as I feel inclined."

There may have been an awful threat in that final sentence of Carolan's, but it was one which

even his picturesque imagination could never afterward bring itself to execute. In the infliction of a fine, brilliant, romance-tinted revenge, he might have been equal to something like an almost noteworthy sacrifice of repute before his fellows. He sometimes read the tragedies in the newspapers and secretly pronounced them magnificent episodes of human passion. Unfortunately, however, they were in the newspapers; they were out of consonance with the idea of being read by the modern average citizen over his coffee and his roll; they should have been surrounded by an Athenian or a mediæval atmosphere. It is possible that after discreetly slipping away from High Bridge and breathing once more the air of his beloved Bohemianism, Carolan began to perceive how deadly prosaic it would be for him to publish a single item of his mysterious knowledge concerning the real authorship of "Rachel Rand." There were editors in New York who would have paid him exorbitantly for the scandalous chronicle in full, and there were a few editors (with sorrow be it recorded!) who would have so paid him without too sharp an interrogation as to its exact authenticity. But Carolan, after that kind of reflection which a completely vain nature can make when devoid of guiding principle, could not at all discern himself, in the event of any such sensational revelation, as the heroic figure that he would have liked to appear. The average citizen, reading

about it all over his coffee and roll, might be disagreeably ratiocinative. The Athenian or mediæval atmosphere would be most inartistically absent from the picture. And besides, there was Lloyd Brockholst's distinct threat to be thought of. Carolan would by no means have enjoyed anything so personally dramatic as a cross-examination from a clever New-York lawyer as to how he had first become the possessor of "Rachel Rand."

But before quitting High Bridge (as he fervently hoped, forever, in spite of the sentiment with which his thwarted passion for Isabel had connected it) he flung his irate rebukes at Mrs. Bondurant. If there is any such left-handed kind of morality as honor among thieves, Mrs. Bondurant richly deserved these rebukes, having betrayed his confidences to her in a spirit of the most frigid treachery. But this lady had turned her back on him and dismissed him, with an expression of contempt which had shown him plainly what a tool and fool she had unscrupulously made of him. She had already become aware of how her own vengeance had missed aim. Brockholst, on the night of their interview together, had let her realize that. But she hid her secret fury of defeat from Carolan, whose departure would have been materially if sombrely gladdened, could he have guessed it.

She caused Isabel, however, to do more than

guess it. She was sick of High Bridge; she meant to try some other place of suburban or rural habitation, and the letter which she soon wrote Isabel was a venomous Parthian shaft. It laid the whole story of her father's sin relentlessly bare to the poor girl who was then a nurse at this father's bedside.

And it was now that Isabel, for the first time, had almost a sense of gratitude because of the blow fallen upon her parent! The darkened mind could feel no more remorseful pangs! The benumbed nerves could thrill no more under the stress of guilty fear! She forgave him as she looked on his terribly altered face, which was in itself the solemn and sorrowful witness of his atonement. And then with shudders, she thought of herself—of her love for the man he had wronged! If they met once again, it must be for the last time. A great sin lay between them, impassable, merciless!

On the evening of that same day Brockholst came at his usual hour. She received him with Mrs. Bondurant's letter in her hand. They stood alone together in the sitting-room. As he stooped to kiss her lips he drew back, startled at the pallor and sadness in her look.

"Is your father worse?" he asked.

"No," she said brokenly. "You must read this. I—I don't know that it will tell you anything new." She held out the letter to

him. "It says that you know the whole miserable story. Read it — and then we will talk about it."

She sank into a chair after she had thus spoken, and remained there with drooped head while Brockholst took the letter to the lamp and read it through. She heard an exasperated sigh leave him more than once; then she heard the letter crackle as he crushed it in one hand.

"It is just like her!" he said. He hastened toward Isabel the next instant. "I had hoped to keep this a secret from you always! There was no use of your knowing — of anybody knowing — except Carolan and that woman."

She looked up at him with moist and glowing eyes.

"How good and generous of you, Lloyd!" she murmured.

He caught both of her hands and held them tightly, standing beside her. "There is no danger, Isabel," he said, with a voice full of earnest and vital encouragement. "That woman has not a vestige of proof except what Carolan has told her, and I am nearly certain that Carolan will not dare to join issue with her in any attempted exposure. Besides, she will have nothing to gain, now. This letter has been a mere spiteful thrust at you — its very wording bears evidence of that."

"Yes," faltered Isabel. "I see spite plainly."

"And its cause," pursued Brockholst, "you can't



see. She leaves that out. But I will explain it all to you hereafter. It concerns an occurrence between herself and me, years ago in Paris. You shall judge just who was the wronger and who the wronged. But not now. I don't want to drag up that hateful memory at this moment. I want only to make you feel that I shall always do every thing to shield *him* — as I shall do every thing to shield *you*, my love, through the years of union that God may give us both!"

She rose from her chair, while he still grasped her hands.

"Oh, no, no!" she said. "It can't be, now!" Her voice dropped to a trembling whisper; she tried, but without avail, to draw her hands away from his.

"Isabel!" he appealed.

"Such a crime as that!" she went on. "And for him to injure you — *you*, of all others!"

"It was no real injury. I cared nothing for . . for what was taken."

"Oh, Lloyd, you *say* that!"

"I mean it, from my soul! . . Besides, Isabel, think of his punishment now — if you choose to call it such. Surely there has been expiation enough! His mind is shattered forever!"

"I know . . I know. But my shame! Oh, how can I ever forget that, when I look in your face!"

He let go her hands and put his arms about her'



drawing her close to his breast. "My Isabel!" he said. "I will make you forget this fancied shame! I will make you forget it in the remembrance that I shall always have of the sweet reward you give me when giving me yourself!"

















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